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Common Babbler - a New Breeding Species for Arabia

By George Gregory

The Common Babbler *Turdoides caudatus* is a generally sociable species which occurs from the Indian subcontinent in the east to Iraq in the west. In Kuwait it has been a vagrant, with five records up to late 2006. These included a group of up to four at Zour Port (OA34) in August 1998, one of which lingered until December 2001.

On 31 December 2006 I discovered a group of at least six Common Babblers at a farm owned by Yacoub Boodai at Abdali (NB36), near the border with Iraq. This group, with a maximum of eight birds together, remained at the same site for many months, raising hopes that they might breed. From 23 February 2007 at least one bird in the group was heard singing, and gradually the group split up, two birds remaining at the same site and others were occasionally seen or heard at adjacent sites. On 1 April 2007 visiting birders Jarl Nystrom and Oivind Syvertsen, and I, observed at least one half-grown fledgling, with short tail and wings, together with two parent birds. We moved away quickly to reduce disturbance. Two fledglings were seen again on 5 April 2007 and on a number of subsequent visits by many resident and visiting birders. Many photographs of the adults and several of the fledglings were taken.

The birds at this breeding site will be monitored in future. It is possible that other Common Babblers are resident at other occupied and abandoned farms at Abdali to which birders do not have access.

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Great Cormorant Breeds in Bahrain

On 14 May 2007 Howard King reported seeing two adult and three young Great Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* on Dumistan Lake, known locally as Nakhl Lawzi (QA29), in north west Bahrain. The young were large and feathered but not yet able to fly, although they could dive well. On 15 June two juveniles were still present. The pair had apparently nested on a very small rocky islet (approx 5 m by 3 m) in the middle of the lake created as a consequence of higher than usual water levels thanks to winter rains. On 9 June an aerial photograph revealed the presence of one or more cormorants on this island. Dumistan Lake is an abandoned sandpit and is the largest body of fresh/brackish water in Bahrain, water levels vary considerably being almost totally dependant on ground and rain water runoff.

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الإشراف والنشر بواسطة
الهيئة الوطنية لحماية الحياة الفطرية
وإنمائها،
ص ب ٦١٦٨١، الرياض،
المملكة العربية السعودية

The sandpit and lake at its fullest extent in 2007 was about 400 m by 400 m. It has been much larger in the past but in recent years large areas have been backfilled for housing. A new sewage treatment plant and several drainage ditches flow into the northern end of the lake where an area of thick vegetation, including reeds, scrub and thorn bushes, has become established. However the water supply is not enough to prevent the lake drying, some years to a series of small ponds, the boundaries formed by the work ways created during the active quarrying period.

Although the lake does contain large numbers of small fish 'guppies' (probably *Aphanius dispar*) which attract numerous herons and egrets to the lake, these are not likely to be big enough prey for the cormorants and dependent young and it is assumed that the adults obtained fish from the sea a distance of about 2.5 km. The adults probably also take fish from the various ornamental pools in the area.

Howard has confirmed that the 'young birds' were definitely not mistakenly identified moulting adults but unfortunately he was not able to check the island for remains of a nest.

The Great Cormorant breeds in the south Caspian region, Turkey and southern Pakistan. All colonies in these areas are reported to be in trees. This breeding record in Arabia is most unexpected however it is perhaps relevant to mention that there are unsubstantiated reports of cormorants breeding in trees in Bahrain over a period of three years in the 1950s (Nightingale and Hill, 1993).

Reference: • Nightingale T & M Hill, 1993. *Birds of Bahrain.* Immel, London.

ABBA Progress Report

In July 2007 the Atlas reached a important landmark in its 25 year history when a draft MS was submitted to the editors of the *Fauna of Arabia* to aid in their preliminary costings and planning work for production. It is planned to submit the completed final MS along with maps for 270 breeding species, species vignettes, maps, photos and appendices in early 2008. There will then follow the usual refereeing, editing, proofing and production stages so perhaps ABBA will be on the shelves in 2009. Present plans are for two English versions, one being a complete issue of the *Journal of the Fauna of Arabia*. For those not familiar with this periodical it is an A4 size hardback journal that is published approximately every 12 months. The second will be a commercial version which is likely be a straight copy of the journal but with a different cover and intro pages. I am also really pleased that there will be an Arabic translation. It is planned that all three versions will be produced at more or less the same time.

This issue of *Phoenix* includes the usual range of new breeding species, unusual records, habitat reports, results of surveys and studies and much more. The new breeding species (Pages 1 and 2) include the Common Babbler *Turdoides caudatus,* a species which in recent years has gradually come onto the radar in Kuwait as a potential breeding bird, and the surprise of the Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* breeding on Bahrain. The circumstances of the latter breeding are slightly equivocal, as no nest, eggs or nestlings were seen, but this record stands beside a possible breeding in earlier years. Clearly it is very desirable to obtain definitive proof of breeding of this species, preferably before the Atlas goes to press. Two new breeding exotics, are shown on pages 10 and 11.

The 'Recent Reports' in this issue include among others a confirmed breeding of Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana* in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia in June 2007, when two observers observed downy young with an adult. This is great news as a number of readers commented that the picture in *Phoenix* 23 of a juvenile photographed in Kuwait was perhaps big enough to have flown in from elsewhere.

I would like to draw attention to two errors in *Phoenix* 23. The reference to booming Eurasian Bitterns *Botaurus stellaris* in eastern Arabia should have read "One or two 'booming' at Khafrah Marsh (PB30), Eastern Province, on four dates in March in 1996 and 1998 (Brian Meadows)." I am glad to be able to mention this exciting record again in the hope that it will stimulate wetlands specialists to keep their ears open at other dense reedbed sites in future springs. The second error for which I am responsible, and very sorry about, is that I erroneously credited the picture of a Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio* on page 22 to Khalid al Nasrallah. Khalid has taken many excellent photos in Kuwait but this one was taken by Abdulrahman al Sirhan. My apologies to both of them for the mistake.

Finally I must say again that the ABBA project and *Phoenix* will not stop with publication of the Atlas. The database will continue and anyone will still be able to ask for information and maps etc from it. *Phoenix* will continue to be issued as an annual newsletter concentrating on breeding species but may broaden its horizons. So keep sending in records and material for *Phoenix*.

Michael Jennings.

New Names for Arabian Birds

In recent years there has been a lot published on regional and global bird lists as well as works on bird taxonomy and nomenclature, especially English names. As announced in *Phoenix* 23:5 the old Voous List (Voous, 1977), which ABBA has followed until now as its standard source, has had its day. When the Atlas is published it will generally follow Dickinson (2003) for order and taxonomy and Gill & Wright (2006), for English names. These works incidentally also include a number of changes at family level to the Voous list.

In this issue of *Phoenix* the new names and taxonomy are used for the first time. There is a centre pullout to this issue listing Arabian breeding birds (ABBA species). A very few suggested names in Dickinson (2003) and Gill & Wright (2006) do not seem appropriate to Arabia and the status quo is retained wherever this is suggested by one or other of these authors, for example Dickinson has some previous *Hippolais* warblers as *Iduna* spp. but Gill and Wright continue to use *Hippolais* which is retained by ABBA. Just a few novel English names will be noted in the listing.

Changes at family level include the Cisticolidae, which includes Scrub, Graceful and Socotra Warblers, now split from the Old World Warblers (Sylvidae), and in Dickinson's order he has the Pycnonotidae (bulbuls) between the two. The latter includes a new name for one of Arabia's most common birds, the White Spectacled Bulbul *P. xanthopygos*. Terns and gulls are all in the Laridae, and Osprey no longer has its own family. Our *Tchagra* is now in Malaconotidae and the Muscicapidae (chats and flycatchers) is separated from Turdidae (thrushes). New genera we have to get familiar with are *Tachymarptis, Todiramphus,*

Clockwise from top left:

Black-winged Stilts *Himantopus himantopus* are perhaps one of the most elegant birds in any wetland however copulation can be a precarious balancing act. Kuwait. (Photo: Khalid al Ghanem). Although this species is now regarded as a regular and widespread wetland breeding bird in Arabia it is often forgotten that it first bred only in 1952 and it did not breed in the Arabian Gulf until 1975.

One Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* chick has already hatched and two other eggs are about to. (Photo:Khalid al Ghanem).

Is the Common Babbler *Turdoides caudata*, which bred in Kuwait in 2007 a species that will colonise north-east Arabia? See page 1. (Photo: Mike Pope).

The Cream-coloured Courser *Cursorius cursor* is a desert adapted wader found widely on the plains of Arabia. It lays its eggs (always two) on shingle without even a scrape. This adult was pictured feeding its chick a grasshopper on Socotra near Hadibo in January 2006. (Photo: Hanne and Jens Eriksen This is from the 2008 Arabian Bird Calendar - see page 7).

Cecropis, Hedydipna, Chalcomitra, Gymnoris.

The introductions to the works cited are recommended reading and explain the rationale behind, for example, placing a hyphen when the second part of an English name is the subject species group, e.g. Eagle-Owl but not in cases like Stone Curlew. (Incidentally 'Stone Chat' in Gill and Wright is a misprint, it should correctly be Stonechat on the basis of long term usage).

The listing enclosed in this issue shows the ABBA species code which is tied to the Old Voous order. In due course these numbers will be rationalised to the Dickinson order.

Nothing is yet finalised and comments on the proposed ABBA names will be welcome.

References: • Dickinson, E C (Ed). 2003. *The Howard and Moore complete checklist of the birds of the world. 3rd edn.* Christopher Helm. London. UK. • Gill, F & M Wright. 2006. *Birds of the World: Recommended English Names.* Princeton University Press, Princeton New Jersey. USA/Christopher Helm. London. UK. • Voous, K H. 1977. *List of Recent Holarctic Bird Species.* British Ornithologists Union.

The three scops owl species breeding in Arabia have completely different calls and are therefore almost certainly different species, but the debate continues about the taxonomy of the Socotra Scops Owl *Otus socotranus*.

Satellite Tracking of UAE Red-billed Tropicbirds

By Salim Javed, Shahid Khan and Junid Nazeer.

Two Red-billed Tropicbirds *Phaethon aethereus* were satellite-tagged by staff of the Environment Agency, Abu Dhabi on the island of Qarnein (SB26), UAE in early 2007. Apparently no previous examples of satellite tracking of Red-billed Tropicbirds are available and our work may be the first ever attempt to satellite track any species of tropicbirds in the world.

Two tropicbirds were captured and fitted with satellite transmitters on 6 February and 6 March respectively. One of the main objectives of the study was to document post breeding dispersal and the migration pattern of birds breeding in the UAE. Birds were captured in nesting cavities while they were breeding or thought to be breeding. The first bird was captured whilst incubating in a crevice on the north-east side of the island. The second bird was captured almost a month later in a nesting cavity on the north-west side of the island, but it had neither an egg or young, it was assumed to have been preparing to lay, although it is possible that it could have been a non-breeding bird. Both birds were marked with an 18g Solar Argos PTT100 manufactured by Microwave Telemetry Inc.

Soon after release the first bird moved towards Zirku island (TA26) and continued eastwards so that by 27 February it had moved through the Strait of Hormuz, to a point about 85 km east of the Fujairah coast. During its entire movement from the day of tagging until the last location on 27 February, the first bird gave 31 locations and covered nearly 850 km in about 21 days. No signals were received from this bird after 27 February either due to a problem with the transmitter or the death of the bird. The second bird showed similar initial movements as the first and it had covered nearly 2,900 km by the end of March by which time it was off the west coast of India near Porbandar, Gujrat. By 30 April it had moved further south along the coast of Kerala covering another 2,544 km. Altogether this individual covered 5,444 km in 55 days. No signals were received after 30 April, presumably due to a transmitter problem.

The Red-billed Tropicbird is a national priority species and may now only breed on the islands of Qarnein, Zirku and Arzanah in the UAE. Though not globally threatened, the species is of conservation concern due to a small and declining global population. The species is known to disperse widely between breeding seasons and juveniles are known to disperse more than the adult birds. In 2007 a comprehensive breeding survey was conducted on Qarnein Island, which supports the largest breeding colony of tropicbirds in the UAE.

Satellite-tagging of two Red-billed Tropicbirds was a pilot study to document outward migration and also to understand optimum transmitter size, harness design, bird behaviour and transmitter performance in a plunge- diving, highly pelagic species. Satellite tracking data obtained from the two birds, although limited to a short period of time, has nevertheless provided interesting information on breeding birds and their movement. Both the birds were nesting or about to nest at the time of capture, but neither of the two birds appeared to have returned to their nest site after transmitter deployment. This may have been due to stress during the capture and deployment.

Salim Javed (E-mail: sjaved@ead.ae*), Shahid Khan and Junid Nazeer, Environment Agency – Abu Dhabi, PO Box 45553, Abu Dhabi, UAE.*

Satellite-tagged Flamingos in the UAE

One of the Greater Flamingos *Phoenicopterus roseus* mentioned in *Phoenix* 23: 7 (Javed & Khan, 2006) which were satellite-tracked from the UAE to Turkmenistan and the north Caspian region, after spending winter 2005/6 in the UAE, returned to winter in the UAE for three months in December 2006. It left the UAE again on 9 March 2007 flying through Iran and on to near Baku in Azerbaijan in the south-west Caspian region by late May, where it stayed three weeks. It continued on to the north east of the Caspian spending the summer months in Kazakhstan. (Information from the website of the Environment Agency, Abu Dhabi).

Recent Reports

The following are a seleetion of some interesting, unexpected or unusual records of Arabian breeding birds (or potential breeders) reccivcd during the last year. Records are from 2007 unless noted otherwise. Please note that not all thesc records have been verified or aecepted by local recorders. Notes after the name of the observer are editorial comment and not necessarily part of the original report.

Helmeted Guineafowl ***Numida meleagris*** Group of scven in Wadi Dayan (JA07), east of Al Kidan, Yemen, 11 November (MCJ). A decreasing species now rarely reported.

Grey Francolin ***Francolinus pondicerianus*** Abandoned nest with eggs near Dhahran (QA29) in 2006 (Adrian Drummond-Hall). First record from the Dhahran area.

Great Crested Grebe ***Podiceps cristatus*** Three pairs at the Jail pools (RA27) Qatar, 20 May. One pair had five juveniles and another had three juveniles (Gordon Saunders). First Qatar breeding.

Lesser Flamingo ***Phoeniconaias minor*** About 1700 at Aden Marsh (KB02), 7 November (MCJ). Once built nests near Aden but has never been confirmed to breed.

Abdim's Stork ***Ciconia abdimii*** Flock of 80 on migration at Aden marsh, 29 October (David Stanton/MCJ).

Sacred Ibis ***Threskionis aethiopicus*** About five at the Aden marsh, 29 October and 7 November (MCJ). Thought to breed locally but there is still no evidence of confirmed breeding from Yemen.

Little Bittern ***Ixobrychus minutus*** Adults feeding unfledged young at Adari pool (QB29) Bahrain, May 2005 (Juhani Kyyro).

Black-crowned Night Heron ***Nycticorax nycticorax*** Two adults with a not fully grown juvenile at Hidd (QB29) Bahrain, May 2005 (Juhani Kyyro)

Black-headed Heron ***Ardea melanocephala*** Two at Aden marsh (KB02), 7 November and one Wadi Dayan east of Al Kidan (JA07), 12 November (MCJ).

Little Egret ***Egretta garzetta*** Pair in breeding plumage at Badaan Farm (QA29) Bahrain, 14 May (Howard King). The species is not confirmed to breed in Arabia.

Black-winged Kite ***Elanus caeruleus*** One soaring over tihama cultivation (JA06), 10 November (MCJ).

Spotted Crake ***Porzana porzana*** Adults and three tiny black downy young at Sabkhat al Fasl (PA31), 15 June (Graham Lobley/Phil Roberts). First breeding in Saudi Arabia.

Purple Swamphen ***Porphyrio porphyrio*** An adult population of about 20-30 birds were estimated at Sabkhat al Fasl, Eastern Province, including an observation of an adult with a large young but still showing signs of down, 27 April. (Graham Lobley). At the Jail Pools, Qatar, pairs were seen with broods of two and three chicks, 23 March (Jamie Buchan/Brian Hunter). First breeding for Qatar.

Eurasian Stone Curlew ***Burhinus oedicnemus*** A wintering bird in the UAE in 2005/6 was reported to have killed a horned viper but did not eat it (Simon Aspinall).

Black-winged Stilt ***Himantopus himantopus*** Breeding reported from three sites on Socotra (UA02) March (Richard Porter).

Little Tern ***Sterna albifrons*** A chick with an adult at Buhair (QB29) Bahrain, 24 April (Howard King). The species has been suspected of having bred previously but this is the first confirmed breeding on Bahrain.

Sooty Tern ***Sterna fuscata*** Several were seen round a rocky promontory on the east side of the Bab al Mandab (JB02) headland in late afternoon and at dusk, 8 November. A few alighted on the rock apparently to roost. Several corpses there indicated that roosting birds fall victim to local cats, which were seen heading to the rock at sunset (MCJ). A short time earlier in mid October the species was recorded at several sites on Socotra (Nick Moran). There is a large breeding colony of this species on Mait island on the northern coast of Somalia on the other side of the Gulf of Aden and the species might be expected more frequently on the Arabian side in late autumn than has been reported to date.

Brown Noddy ***Anous stolidus*** Frequently seen during October and November on the coast of the Gulf of Aden especially near the islands off Bir Ali and at Bab al Mandab. Seen to settle directly on the sea and also to take fish discarded by fishermen (David/Stanton/MCJ).

European Turtle Dove ***Streptopelia turtur*** At least 12 males calling at Dauka (UA14), southern Oman, 30 June (Steve Tibbett)

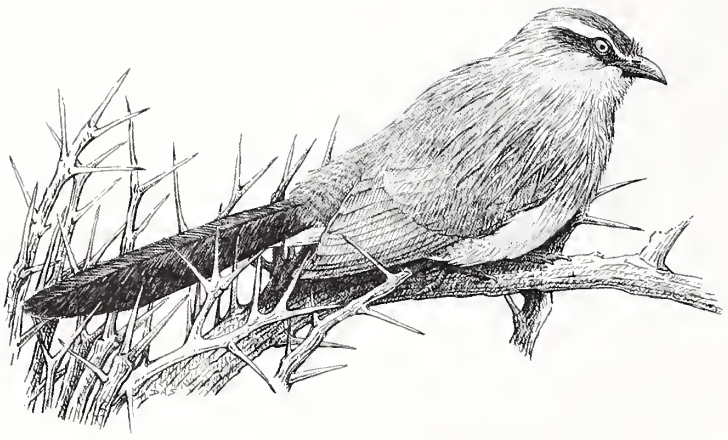
African Collared Dove ***Streptopelia roseogrisea*** More or less an annual visitor to the Thumrait area (UA12) of Dhofar, Oman from August to October. One present from 6 December 2006 and singing 15 December (first time heard calling at site) was present until at least 14 Feb, sometimes in the company of a Eurasian Collared Dove *S. decaocto*. At Mudayy village (TA11) to the west of Thumrait, juveniles and an adult were seen at the end of June and early July (Steve Tibbett).

Desert Eagle-Owl ***Bubo ascalaphus*** Pairs seen near al Kharrara (RA26) Qatar from 12 June (Fran Gillespie and others).

Egyptian Nightjar ***Caprimulgus aegyptius*** Up to ten present early May Sabah al Ahmed Reserve (NB36) Kuwait (George Gregory). In view of the number of over-summering birds in recent years in the northern Gulf breeding almost certainly occurs.

Malachite Kingfisher ***Alcedo cristata*** During a trip to eastern Yemen 14 December 2006 - 1Jan 2007 David Stanton recorded this species in two squares along the Wadi Meseila (QB08 & RA07) and two squares on the Wadi Hajar (OB05 & OA05), a total of eight birds, mostly sitting on stream-side vegetation or midstream boulders. This species is now known from ten squares in Yemen and three in Oman, most records are in the months September to April, there are only single records in June and July.

Woodchat Shrike ***Lanius senator*** One, two, possibly three pairs, were courting and nest building at Tulha (NB36) Kuwait, April–June (George Gregory, Khalid al Nasrallah and Abdulrahman al Sirhan). One nest photographed 9 May by Khalid al Ghanem held two blind young and an egg, and two young were about to fledge on 19 May. At 2,200 m on Saiq plateau (XB23), northern Oman, an adult was seen with food and behaving as if breeding 18 May (Hanne and Jens Eriksen).



White-browed Coucal ***Centropus superciliosus*** Two calling after dusk in Wadi Hajar (OB05) eastern Yemen, 29 December 2006 (David Stanton). This is the furthest east record on Arabian mainland.

House Crow ***Corvus splendens*** During recent visits to Yemen this recent colonist was observed 60 km inland south east of Taiz and 30 km inland of Zinjibar, both distances were, er...., as the crow flies. It was present in a new area near Wadi Hajar in eastern Yemen but was not seen at the coastal villages of Ibn Abbas (IB07) and Luhayyah (IB08) on the Red Sea.

Bar-tailed Lark ***Ammomanes cinctura*** Recorded in the Dukhan area (QB28), Qatar in spring 2007 (John Norton). First record for Qatar.

Graceful Prinia ***Prinia gracilis*** Reported from several sites in Qatar since 2005 including food carrying at Mesaieed (RB26) in May (Jamie Buchan). There are previous unconfirmed records from Qatar but the species now appears to be colonising the state.

Bank Myna ***Acridotheres ginginianus*** One or two pairs seen and photographed at Al Shanhaniya (RA27), Qatar January (Martin Vestergaard). First records for Qatar.

Black Scrub Robin ***Cercotrichas podobe*** First Bahrain record 8-14 April (Judy Webster/Howard King). Also second for Qatar, on south-east coast (RB26), 4 May (Jamie Buchan), with another at Al Shanhaniya (RA27), 16 November (Gordon Saunders).

Isabelline Wheatear ***Oenanthe isabellina*** Two and a possible pair at 2,200 m Saiq plateau, northern Oman, 18 May (Jens and Hanne Eriksen). Breeding still not confirmed at the site but seems most likely.

Nile Valley Sunbird ***Hedydipna metallica*** Adults and juveniles together Wadi Banawt (TA12) and Mudayy, 30 June (Steve Tibbett).

Spanish Sparrow ***Passer hispaniolensis*** Up to 38 wintered for the first time at Thumrait 2006/7 (Steve Tibbett). A colony of about 100 nests under construction at Mekainis (RA27), Qatar, February (Andrew Bailey).

Arabian Waxbill ***Estrilda rufibarba*** Two at 200 m Wadi Dayan east of al Kidan (JA07), 12 November (MCJ).

Arabian Serin ***Serinus rothschildi*** One Wadi Hajar (OA05), eastern Yemen, 30 December 2006 (David Stanton). Easternmost record.

Golden-winged Grosbeak Two al Hawf (TA10), extreme eastern Yemen, 26 December 2006 (David Stanton).

Announcements and Requests for Information

Sooty Falcon research - Cooperators needed

We have initiated a study of Sooty Falcons *Falco concolor* in Oman. We are fitting birds with numbered British Trust for Ornithology (BTO) rings and microchip or Passive Induced Transponder (PIT) rings to better understand movement, longevity, recruitment and turnover of breeders. The microchip rings are fitted on one leg and the BTO ring on the other. PIT rings contain a uniquely coded microchip like those inserted under the skin of pets and hunting falcons. We can recapture these birds electronically in years subsequent to ringing by putting a microchip reader in the nest serape. This non-invasive technique has the potential of producing much more data than traditional ringing and has been used to study Merlin *F. columbarius*, Peregrine Falcon *F. peregrinus* and sandgrouse *Pterocles* sp. (See our web site at *www.natural-research.org*). We are interested in assembling a network of licensed ringers who are handling Sooty Falcons, so as to fit more falcons with microchip rings. Rings clip on, so are very easy to fit. We would provide these for free, and if individual researchers start marking large number of falcons we would lend them a reader when ringed birds start to enter the breeding population. If you are interested in this initiative please contact, Dr M J McGrady, Natural Research Ltd., email: *mike.mcgrady@natural-research.org*.

Tagged Cinereous Vultures from Turkey and Armenia

Turkey: For the last seven years the breeding success of Cinereous Vultures *Aegypius monachus* has been monitored and nest site preferences have been studied in the Turkmenbaba Mountain region, near Eskisehir (north-west Turkey), where the largest Cinereous Vulture colony in the country exists.

In order to study of movements of the individuals, radio transmitters were fitted in two nestlings (about 90-100 days old) in 2006 and in 2007. Furthermore this summer a nestling has been wing-tagged. The patagial tag is red with white numbers, fastened with a yellow pin on the left wing of the bird.

Please report sightings to Elif Yamac, Anadolu University, Science Faculty, Biology Department, 26470, Eskisehir, TURKEY (e-mail: *eerdogdu@anadolu.edu.tr*) Tel: +90 222 3350580, Fax: +90 222 3204910.

Armenia: in August 2007 two juvenile Cinereous Vultures from the Khosrov Reserve, the only place the species breeds in Armenia, were fitted with satellite tags.

Monitoring and tracking of vultures via satellite is supported by Lush Foundation (Lush Ltd). Additionally, juveniles were wing-tagged using blue patagial wing tags showing numbers '01' and '02'.

Please report sightings to Mamikon Ghasabyan, Armenian Society for the Protection of Birds (ASPB) Aghbyur Serob 11/2, Yerevan, 0019, Armenia (Tel/fax: + 374 10 22 65 41: Email: *armbirds@yahoo.com*).

DVD: The Nests, eggs, nestlings and fledglings of the Western Palearctic

I am currently assembling images for this DVD. The geographic range covered is more extensive than in 'BWP' and includes the whole of the Arabian Peninsula (but not Socotra), and eastwards to just beyond the Aral Sea in Central Asia and to the Yenisey River in Northern Russia. Approximately 750 species breed in the area covered, of which we currently have images for just over 650. For many species we have fairly comprehensive photographic coverage already, including: habitat, nest site, several nests and eggs (where there is variation), and young at different stages from hatching to fledging. However photographs are still required, mainly of eggs & young, for a number of species which breed in Arabia — see the list below.

Not surprisingly with an excess of 6000 images the publishers are not paying for the use of them, other than in exceptional circumstances, but will supply a free copy of the DVD to those whose photographs are used and will give full acknowledgement alongside the images.

Please contact me by email *petercastell@castellandco.co.uk* if you are able to contribute. I can scan colour slides and negatives.

Peter Castell

Species for which photos and images are required: Philby's Partridge *Alectoris philbyi*, Arabian Partridge *Alectoris melanocephala*, See-see *Ammoperdix griseogularis*, Sand Partridge *Ammoperdix heyi*, Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus*, Grey Francolin *Francolinus pondicerianus*, Harlequin Quail *Coturnix delegorguei*, Audubon's (Persian) Shearwater *Puffinus lherminieri persicus*, Jouanin's Petrel *Bulweria fallax*, Abdim's Stork *Ciconia abdimii*, Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus*, Hamerkop *Scopus umbretta*, Pink-backed Pelican *Pelecanus rufescens*, Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra*, Socotra Cormorant *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis*, Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor*, Lanner Falcon *Falco biarmicus*, Barbary Falcon *Falco pelegrinoides*, Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus*, Bateleur *Terathopius ecaudatus*, Verreaux's Eagle *Aquila verreauxii*, Arabian Bustard *Ardeotis arabs*, Eastern Houbara *Chlamydotis macqueenii*, Crab Plover *Dromas ardeola*, Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata*, Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*, Spotted Sandgrouse *Pterocles senegallus*, Crowned Sandgrouse *Pterocles coronatus*, African Olive Pigeon *Columba arquatrix*, Dusky Turtle Dove *Streptopelia lugens*, Bruce's Green Pigeon *Treron waalia*, Pallid Scops Owl *Otus brucei*, African Scops Owl *Otus senegalensis*, Desert Eagle Owl *Bubo ascalaphus*, Hume's Owl *Strix butleri*, Nubian Nightjar *Caprimulgus nubicus*, Plain Nightjar *Caprimulgus inornatus*, African Palm Swift *Cypsiurus parvus*, Pallid Swift *Apus pallidus*, Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis*, Abyssinian Roller *Coracias abyssinicus*, Arabian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos dorae*, House Crow *Corvus splendens*, Fan-tailed Raven *Corvus rhipidurus*, Singing Bushlark *Mirafra cantillans*, Thick-billed Lark *Rhamphocoris clotbey*, Dunn's Lark *Eremalauda dunni*, Brown Woodland Warbler *Phylloscopus umbrovirens*, Amethyst Starling *Cinnyricinclus leucogaster*, Bank Myna *Acridotheres ginginianus*, Tristram's Starling *Onychognathus tristramii*, Yemen Thrush *Turdus menachensis*, Black Scrub Robin *Cercotrichas podobe*, Red-breasted Wheatear *Oenanthe bottae*, Mourning Wheatear *Oenanthe lugens*, Hume's Wheatear *Oenanthe albonigra*, Hooded Wheatear *Oenanthe monacha*, Blackstart *Cercomela melanura*, Shining Sunbird *Cinnyris habessinicus*, Pale Rockfinch *Carpospiza brachydactyla*, Yellow-throated Sparrow *Petronia xanthocollis*, Arabian Waxbill *Estrilda rufibarba*, Arabian Accentor *Prunella fagani*, Yemen Serin *Serinus menachensis*, Golden-winged Grosbeak *Rhynchostruthus socotranus*, Sinai Rosefinch *Carpodacus synoicus*.

Arabian Bird calendar

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A Pilot Survey of Sooty Falcons on Islands of Northern Oman

By M McGrady, M Nicoll, and N Williams.

In August and September 2007 teams from Natural Research Ltd and the University of Reading undertook a survey of Sooty Falcons *Falco concolor* on the islands off northern Oman. This effort was made possible by support from the Office of the Adviser for Conservation of the Environment (Diwan of Royal Court), Royal Yacht Squadron (Royal Court Affairs), the Ministry of Environment and Climate Affairs and Petroleum Development Oman.

In as much as was possible we aimed to repeat the survey of Walter (1979) some 29 years ago. However, we also sought to undertake groundwork that would pilot future biological and ecological studies of this fascinating falcon, and provide a basis for establishing regular survey and monitoring of the Sooty Falcon population in Oman.

Our study focussed on the Fahal (YA24/YB24), Daimaniyat (YA24) and Suwaydi Islands (XB24). These islands were identified by Walter as holding the majority of the Oman population, though his survey did not include a comprehensive study of the Musandam Peninsula. Fahal Island, the Daimaniyat Islands and the Suwaydi Islands are located WNW of Muscat at distances of about nine, 60, and 80 km, respectively.

We made two field trips to the islands, one during 13- 25 August to collect initial information on nest site location, occupancy and egg laying, and one from 27 September to 6 October to check that no sites had been missed during the August effort, determine reproductive success and to ring chicks.

Occupancy of sites was determined from both boat-based and on-foot surveys. We surveyed all nine of the Daimaniyat Islands, all six of the Suwaydi Islands and Fahal Island. The maps of Walter were a helpful start to search efforts on some islands, but we attempted to systematically survey all suitable habitat. Sooty Falcons are cliff or ground nesters and most nests were located under overhangs or within cavities providing shade. This would seem important for this species as it nests in hot areas during high summer. We did not search mainland sites for the species because

of time limitations. We know that mainland sites exist, but do not know their number.

Nest sites that were found in August were, wherever possible, marked and their location determined using GPS. During August we were unable to land on some of the Suwaydi Islands and Fahal Island because of heavy seas and lack of permission, so the locations of some nests were estimated and mapped onto aerial photographs. During our September-October fieldwork we visited nest sites, determined the number of nestlings, fitted them with rings and measured them, and examined nest remains. We also re-searched areas for nests we might have missed during the August field work.

At least 96 nesting territories were occupied by at least one falcon. On some islands, such as Fahal where many falcons nest, our estimate of occupancy may be imprecise. We located 55 nests that had at least one egg. Overall, the mean clutch size was 2.95 (n= 22) and the mean number of chicks per successful nest was 2.96 (n= 27). Most broods had three chicks. In late September early October chicks varied in age from about a week old to recently fledged (30-35 days). Some 63 chicks were ringed with numbered British Trust for Ornithology rings and microchip rings. Microchip rings will enable birds to be recaptured electronically, if they return to become breeders.

On the Daimaniyat Islands at least 28 nests had eggs (judging by parental behaviour or nest visits), 16 of these had chicks when we visited in September. A minimum of 52 chicks was found on these islands; 49 were ringed and measured. The mean number of chicks per successful nest was 3.25.

We did not land on the Suwaydi Islands during our August fieldwork, but we determined that at least four nests contained eggs. Judging from adult behaviour or observations of nestlings, at least four nests had chicks in September, but three of these were inaccessible. A minimum of six chicks was produced on these islands; we were able to ring only a single falcon nestling there.

Because we were unable to land on Fahal Island during our August fieldwork, we did not record clutch size. We judged by the behaviour of the adult falcons and visiting nests in September-October that at least 20 nest sites had at least one chick. We were able to visit nine nests on Fahal that had chicks; we ringed 24.

Broadly, the number of occupied nest sites we observed was lower than that reported by Walter (1979). On the Daimaniyat Islands we identified 40 territories, 14-16 on the Suwaydi Islands and 41 on Fahal. On the same islands Walter reports 42, 16-18 and 47 territories, respectively. The greatest differences between our results and those of Walter were at islands that had the greatest number of breeding pairs/territories (Jun and Fahal), and at these he spent more time than we did. It may be that the results from the two methodologies are not strictly comparable, and that our lower number of occupied sites may be the result of the shorter period of time we spent searching some islands. Additionally, Walter determined fledging success for some nests by watching from a distance. Time constraints prevented us from doing the same. We did find some evidence that unintentional human disturbance by fishermen and diving tourists landing on the islands may have caused some pairs to fail.

Walter's study in 1978 and this one (so far) are only single-year efforts. We do not know if the results of either are representative. Walter recorded breeding at mainland sites and we know that some of these sites are still active Sooty Falcon home ranges (A. Kiyumi, pers.comm.). There appears to be some evidence of nesting (at low densities) in the mountains south of the north Oman coastal plain (D. Seargent, pers. comm.). Walter did not find any evidence of nesting in the mountains.

Prey remains were examined and collected from some nests. We have not as yet analysed these remains, but in brief bird remains predominated, followed by remains of large insects, particularly dragonflies and locusts. Bat remains were also found. Bridled Tern *Sterna anatheatus* appeared to be the largest prey that was regularly taken, while remains of wheatear *Oenanthe* sp., Hoopoe *Upupa epops*, and Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus* were commonly found. We are working with local enthusiasts and the Natural History Museum of Oman to create a reference collection of prey remains and to gain a greater understanding of Sooty Falcon diet and how it varies through the season.

There are real and potential problems related to human visitations at the islands, but we feel that these problems can be averted by good management and policing of existing restrictions. Current restrictions are likely to have a positive benefit for nesting birds on the islands. Apart from conservation aimed at preserving biodiversity, Oman is becoming an important tourist destination because of its natural beauty, so conserving Oman's natural heritage is important for commercial reasons. If direct or indirect human disturbance is causing falcons and other nesting birds to fail then these places will become less special and will be less desired by tourists.

We must emphasize that these findings are interim and should be used with caution. We do not know if the lower number of nests found by us represents a real decline, is an annual variation or is an artefact of different methodologies.

Until very recently the status of the Sooty Falcon was one of "Least concern" (BirdLife International 2004). However this has been downgraded to "near-threatened" (BirdLife International 2007). Some population estimates are as low as 1,000 pairs (Gaucher et al 1995 and Jennings 2006) and if accurate then Fahal island and the Daimaniyat Islands could both hold about 4% of the world population of this falcon. We are planning to conduct a second year of fieldwork in 2008, and will publish our findings in due course.

One of the most heartening results of this years fieldwork for us was the level of cooperation between a range of interested people and organizations. Without this the work would not have been possible. A variety of opportunities exist to increase cooperation and for involvement for local and visiting enthusiasts and students. From a conservation standpoint, clarifying the status of the population of Sooty Falcons, especially in light of the recent downward re-estimates of global population size, is of prime importance.

References: • BirdLife International 2004. *Falco concolor*. In: IUCN 2007. *2007 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. www.iucnredlist.org*. Downloaded on 15 October 2007. • BirdLife International 2007, *HTTP://www.birdlifeforums.org/webx/.2cba5b73* (accessed 24 December 2007). • Gaucher, P, Thiollay, J-M & Eichaker, X. 1995. The Sooty Falcon (*Falco concolor*) on the Red Sea coast of Saudi Arabia: distribution, numbers and conservation. *Ibis* 137: 29-34. • Jennings, M C. 2006. A note on the status, distribution and population of breeding birds of prey in Arabia *http://www.hawar-islands.com* (accessed June 2006). • Walter, H. 1979. The Sooty Falcon (*Falco concolor*) in Oman: results of a breeding survey. *Journal of Oman Studies* 5: 9-59.

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The timing of breeding of the Clamorous Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus* may be linked to the quality of winter rains. See page 19.

Journals, Reports and Other Publications

The following notes list some of the papers concerning birds and other wildlife which have appeared in various journals and newsletters relevant to the Arabian environment in recent months. Space does not permit the full citation of each article but further information can be obtained from the various societies and organisations shown. Note that in addition to the main papers listed most periodicals also include regular features such as recent reports, brief notes etc.

Zoology in the Middle East

Volume 39 (2006) is comprised of 13 papers and seven short communications including three on birds; the diet of the Little Owl, *Athene noctua*, in Israel, ecological segregation between Iranian wheatears, and the Alexandrine Parakeet, *Psittacula eupatria*, in Tehran, Iran. Mammal articles cover the status and distribution of gazelle species in Egypt, Dugong in Egypt and horseshoe bats from northern Syria. A note on the records of sea snakes (subfamily Hydrophiinae) from the coastal waters of Abu Dhabi is one of three papers on reptiles. Invertebrate papers include one on ticks in Yemen. **Volume 40** (2007) Includes a paper on the effect of vegetation cover on the structure of bird communities in a hyperarid desert, mammal papers cover bats in Turkey and several notes on reptiles and amphibians, including one on the morphological characteristics of the Spiny-tailed Lizard (Dhub) , *Uromastyx aegyptius microlepis* from the United Arab Emirates. **Volume 41** (2007) holds 13 papers and six shorter notes, bird interest concerns articles on the distribution of the White-spectacled Bulbul *Pycnonotus xanthopygos* in Turkey and a record of the Demoiselle Crane in Jordan. Mammal reports concern the Caracal in Iran, the Leopard in the Caucasus and the European Otter in Iraq. The only paper relating directly to the ABBA area is a note on the first record in Kuwait of the web-footed sand gecko *Stenodactylus arabicus*, some 400 km further north than recorded previously. There are two other articles on reptiles, two on fish and nine on invertebrates.

ZME annual subscription (three issues) price Euro 48 (£32, $64), ISSN 0939-7140. Available from Kasparek Verlag Mönchhofstr. 16, 69120 Heidelberg, Germany. Tel. (+49) 6221 / 47 50 69, Fax (+49) 6221 / 47 18 58. Email: Kasparek@t-online.de.

Fauna of Arabia

Vol 22 (2006) : This volume contains 12 papers on the invertebrates of Arabia covering Bryozoans, Polychaetes, Crustaceans, Arachnids (three papers on the ticks of Yemen and Saudi Arabia) and insects. Major papers concern a revision of the scaleworms (polychaeta: Aphroditoidea) occurring in the seas around the Arabian Peninsula, the insect order Embiidina of north-east Africa and the Red Sea region, the cockroaches of Yemen and the dusty lacewings of the Arabian peninsula. **Vol 23 (2007)**: This volume includes 14 papers on a variety of fauna from all parts of Arabia and nearby regions. There are papers on the marine fauna from the seas around Arabia, notably the Yemen Red Sea, the Gulf of Aqaba and the north-west Indian Ocean. For terrestrial species papers cover particularly Socotra, mainland Yemen as well as the Arabian Peninsula generally. Subjects are corals, Polychaetes, Crustaceans (deep seas crabs), Arachnids (four papers on spiders and one of pseudoscorpions), insects (two papers on coleoptera and one each on hymenoptera and diptera). The two papers on vertebrates include a new species of fish for the Red Sea and a review of the taxonomy of spiny-tailed lizards *Uromastyx* spp. or Dhub as most of us know them. There are six species of Dhub in Arabia.

Editor in chief Friedhelm Krupp, published by King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology, NCWCD Riyadh and the Senkenberg Institute, Frankfurt. Arabic contents include introductory pages, title and an abstract of each paper. Hardbound, A4 size, Vol 22, 480 pages, Vol 23. 526 pages. Available from the distributors Karger Libri AG, Petersgraben 31, 4009 Basle, Switzerland. ISBN 10 3-929907-76-3. (http://www.liri.ch.agency/services/faunaofarabia.htm).

Tribulus Vol 16

Part 1 (Spring/Summer 2006) has a wide range of articles including one on satellite tracking of Greater Flamingos in the UAE as well as notes on shells, flowers, butterflies, climate and archeology. Part 2 (Autumn/Winter 2006) contains articles on 20th century archeology in UAE mountains, intertidal molluscs, Diptera (flies), new grasses & the possible extinction of a species of gobyfish in UAE. *Tribulus* is prepared by the Emirates Natural History Group (Abu Dhabi).

NB. The ENHG branch in Al Ain is scanning back issues of *Tribulus* and PDF's are available. See the website *http://www.enhg.org/trib/tribpdf.htm* which includes a table of contents for each issue, a facsimile of each page and a searchable text version suitable for electronic indexing but watch out for OCR errors.

Podoces Vol 2 No1 (2007) - the west and central Asian ornithological journal

This Iran based journal publishes ornithological papers and short notes in English and Persian. The present issue holds three papers and nine short notes (76 pages in all) and has a geographical coverage from Turkey to Kerala, southern India. Probably the most important paper in this issue and the most useful to those interested in Arabian breeding birds, is a review of the breeding

waterbirds in Iran based on the numerous Iran Department of Environment wetland bird surveys carried out during the years 1970-77. Although parts of the data collected during these surveys have been published elsewhere the complete results of the survey had never been published before and makes very interesting reading. The nearly 80 wetland breeding species include 14 ducks. There are staggering numbers for some species, for example minimum totals of 5,000 pairs of Great Cormorants, 3,000 pairs of White Storks, 15,000 pairs of Greater Flamingos. There are accounts for each breeding species, several distribution maps and an appendix of wetland sites in Iran which gives the protected status of each.

Contact: Abolghasem Khaleghizadeh (Editor) P O Box 1336, Karaj 31585, Iran. Email: akhaleghizadeh@yahoo.com. *ISSN 1735-6725.*

Wildlife Middle East News

This newsletter appears quarterly, articles are in Arabic and English. Contents of the four most recent issues (to Vol 2 No 2), have concerned a wide range of subjects. Ornithological interest includes articles on European Bee-eater, captive guineafowl, Houbara Bustard and avian flu. Other notes cover the hand rearing of mammals, exotic felids, Beira antelope, smuggled cheetah, ungulate handling equipment, nutrition of zoo animals, camera trap surveys, CITES implementation, Spiny-tailed Lizard (Dhub) and algal blooms. There are special notes on Jordan, Somalia, Lebanon and the Sahara. For more details see *www.wmenews.com*.

Breeding Exotic - Superb Starling

The Superb Starling *Lamprotornis superbus* is an Afrotropical species occurring in north-east Africa, from Sudan to Tanzania, including Somalia. It has been reported from the UAE since 1984, with records from al Ain, where some are known to have escaped from the local zoo in the 1980s and also Ras al Khaimah but most have been reported from the Sharjah and Dubai area. Like many exotics it has received very little attention from ornithologists and despite its presence over two decades, it was only in 2006 that any breeding activity was reported. It may have been breeding ferally throughout the intervening period. In 2006 birds were seen carrying nesting material at Sharjah University City in February and April and at the end of July four immatures were reported at the site. At the end of April 2007 an adult was seen feeding a young bird also at Sharjah University, where most records of the species have come from in recent years. There is no information from Arabia about its biology or nidification. There may be less than a dozen breeding pairs.

Many thanks to Tommy Pedersen and the UAE Bird Records Committee for recent records. Any further information on this species would be gratefully received by ABBA.

Breeding Exotic - Plum-headed Parakeet

The Plum-headed Parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala* is a native of India and Sri Lanka and, like many Indian parrots, a number find their way to Arabia via the pet trade. A female and a food begging young bird were seen in the Dubai Creekside park (VA27) on 26 May 2007 by Derrick Wilby thereby adding a new species to the Arabian breeding bird list. Two days later Derrick saw a male with a juvenile (perhaps the same one) in the same park.

This species was first recorded in Arabia at Sohar in northern Oman in 1991 and there were other records near Muscat and Dibba in 1995, but apparently it has not been seen in Oman since. In 2002 it began to be seen regularly in the Dubai area, notably Safa Park, which still appears to be its stronghold, where up to 12 have been seen together between 2002 and 2008. It is now recorded from at least three other sites around Dubai and is also known from Sharjah, Jebal Ali Golf Resort (VA26) and Al Hayir poultry farms (VB26).

This species was at one time regarded as conspecific with the Blossom-headed Parakeet *P. roseata,* indeed some of the older records of the two species in Arabia might have been confused because of this. The Blossom-headed has been recorded in

Arabia rather more often and for longer (first record 1985) than the Plum-headed but has not yet been confirmed to breed. (Parrots live a long time and presence over many years is not in itself proof of breeding).

Records of both these species, especially if indicative of breeding, are required by the ABBA project. Also any information on food and habitat utilisation would be helpful. Many thanks to Tommy Pedersen and the UAE and Oman Bird Records Committees and Derrick Wilby for the records in this report.

The Meinertzhagen Mysteries

By Michael C Jennings

In *Phoenix* 23 I reviewed (Jennings, 2007) some of the evidence of the dishonesty of Richard Meinertzhagen (RM) and offered some caution on the reliability of the contents of his book *Birds of Arabia* (Meinertzhagen, 1954). My opinion of RM has changed considerably over the years. He always had some odd ideas and in my view some strange opinions but since the Knox (1993) paper in *Ibis* I have started to look very seriously at all his material and with the publication of Rasmussen & Collar (1999), and Seabrook (2006), I felt that all his Arabian information was a liability rather than an asset to ABBA. In the last year the latest biography of RM (the fourth!) by Brian Garfield entitled *The Meinertzhagen Mystery; The life and legend of a colossal fraud* (2006), was published. It removes all doubt remaining about whether anything RM ever touched can be relied on.

The book looks critically at all aspects of his life. The author has tried to match all the various adventures and claimed achievements of RM with independent sources. The author acknowledges how very difficult it is to prove a negative but his meticulous study reveals that in most of the incidents researched, RM's account could not be substantiated. It often transpires that RM was not in the place he claims to have been on the day he claims an event happened. The results suggest that nothing important or adventuresome that he claims to have achieved (and he has claimed an awful lot) actually took place. His unsubstantiated adventures include his haversack ruse in Palestine for which he became famous. Also disproved are his claim to have flown near the summit of Kilimanjaro in WW I reaching 17,000 ft (5181 m), at a time only a few aircraft could struggle up to about 12,000 ft; his claim in the same period to have taken a small force into German East Africa creating huge carnage and losing all his men (he was proven to be in the Kenya HQ everyday of this 'escapade' evidenced by his signing off the daily security report); the time he went game shooting with T Roosevelt eight years after he had died (he did get sloppy in later years); his meeting with Hitler before WW2 when he claimed to have had a loaded revolver in his pocket (Hitler was elsewhere that day). It goes on and on and is an extremely interesting and well referenced detective story.

I would seriously recommend that anyone with any remaining doubts about the honesty of RM should get the book for a good read and to dispel those doubts. As far as ABBA in concerned I now believe that all RM material is so unreliable that nothing associated directly with him can be taken at face value. As a consequence I have changed all records on the ABBA database that relate to his book, his published material, specimens, comments on the work of others and unpublished sources, so that they will not appear in the Atlas when published. Although it all still appears on the database with suitable caution it will not be appear on maps produced from it. If I am able to rehabilitate individual records from other independent sources then I will do so, but so far there are very few. Some examples of rehabilitated records include a number of his specimens shown as collected by RM and others that have been verified to have been collected at the place and date that appear on his labels. However the large majority of his own specimens are intrinsically unreliable as he kept no accession register and or field notes back them up.

Unfortunately so much of this material, especially his cited book, has been included uncritically into many published works, including major handbooks, that his lies will persist in the literature for a very long time to come.

References: • Garfield, B. 2006. *The Meinertzhagen Mystery; The life and legend of a colossal fraud.* Potomac Books. • Jennings, M C. 2007 More news of Meinertzhagen's misdeeds. *Phoenix* 23: 9-10. • Knox, A .1993. Richard Meinertzhagen, - a case of fraud examined. *Ibis* 135: 320-325. • Meinertzhagen, R. 1954. *Birds of Arabia.* Oliver & Boyd, Edinburgh & London. • Rasmussen, P C & N J Collar. 1999. Major specimen fraud in the Forrest Owlet *Heteroglaux* (*Athene* auct.) *blewitti*. *Ibis* 141:11-21. • Seabrook, J. 2006. Ruffled feathers - uncovering the biggest scandal in the bird world. *The New Yorker* 29 May 2006: 50-61.

Purple Swamphen Breeding Again in Kuwait

By Pekka Fågel

The breeding of Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio* was proved for the first time in Kuwait in 1996 when Charles Pilcher found three chicks at Jahra Pool reserve (Gregory 2005). Jahra Pools dried out at the end of that decade and the swamphens disappeared.

The next time the species was seen in Kuwait was on 12 May 2005. I found at least two birds at Doha South reedbeds. Soon after this Brian Foster and I counted six birds at the site and we estimated 3-4 pairs were present. The site consists of two abandoned fish pools approximately 300m across which are surrounded by reeds. Since the site was visited several times during the spring of 2005 it is quite obvious that these birds had just arrived when they were first seen. During numerous follow-up visits in the next two years no proof of breeding was obtained although they were displaying in spring 2006 and were thought likely to have bred that year. On 28 June 2007 I finally saw two chicks with adults in the southern pool and got a few distant photographs.

It seems that the Purple Swamphen is very secretive when breeding but the pools are also difficult to check properly because of the dense reedbeds which surround them. The population at the site is now estimated to be 5-6 pairs.

Reference • Gregory, G. *2005. The Birds of the State of Kuwait.* Privately published, Skegness, England 2005.

Pekka Fågel #20 Al Ajmi Bldg., Block 71, Mahboula, Kuwait (Email: pekka.fagel@temet.fi*).*

Little Grebe has Bred Again at Jahra Pool Reserve, Kuwait

By Khaled al Ghanem

During 2006 Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* was found breeding again in Jahra Pool Reserve (NB35) in Kuwait after a gap of several years. The reserve (see Al Ghanem, & Al Shehabi, 2006; Evans, 1994) is considered to be one of the most important host areas in Kuwait for migrant birds. It is categorized as a coastal site and is located at the south-west side of Kuwait Bay.

Clockwise from top:

Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* bred in Kuwait in 2006, the first time it has done so in that state since 1996. See page 11. (Photo: Khalid al Ghanem).

The Desert Eagle-Owl *Bubo ascalaphus* is a magnificent bird and a top desert predator of rodents and birds, Jebal Ali, Dubai, UAE (Photo:Drew Gardner).

Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio* is another species that appears to be colonising dense reed beds in the Arabian Gulf, with breeding now confirmed in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE. It bred again in Kuwait in 2007 for the first time since 1996. See page 11. (Photo: Pekka Fågel).

One aspect of the biology of the House Crow *Corvus splendens* which is not generally recognised is that they are an important avian predator, particularly of nestlings. Here an adult in Kuwait feeds a fledged young bird parts of what appears to be either a juvenile sparrow or myna, held under its claw. (Photo: Khalid al Ghanem).

BREEDING BIRDS IN ARABIA

Showing the names and taxonomic order of species , relevant to the ABBA project from 2008 onwards. See explanatory notes at the end.

ABBA Species Number (Note A)	Names to be used: Preferred English name and scientific name. The author and date are added to further assist understanding. (Note B)	Names used during the data collection phase of the Atlas, where different. (Notes C & D)
1	OSTRICH *Struthio camelus* Linnaeus, 1758	
398	HELMETED GUINEAFOWL *Numida meleagris* (Linnaeus,1758)	
355	CHUCKAR PARTRIDGE *Alectoris chukar* (J. E. Gray, 1830)	CHUKAR
360	PHILBY'S PARTRIDGE *Alectoris philbyi* P. R. Lowe, 1934	PHILBY'S CHUKAR
361	ARABIAN PARTRIDGE *Alectoris melanocephala* (Rüppell, 1835)	ARABIAN RED-LEGGED PARTRIDGE
362*	SEE-SEE PARTRIDGE *Ammoperdix griseogularis* (J. F. Brandt, 1843)	
363	SAND PARTRIDGE *Ammoperdix heyi* (Temminck, 1825)	
364*	BLACK FRANCOLIN *Francolinus francolinus* (Linnaeus,1766)	
365	GREY FRANCOLIN *Francolinus pondicerianus* (J.F. Gmelin 1789)	
370	COMMON QUAIL *Coturnix coturnix* (Linnaeus,1758)	
2001	HARLEQUIN QUAIL *Coturnix delegorguei* Delegorgue, 1847	
2035*	INDIAN PEAFOWL *Pavo cristatus* Linnaeus,1758	COMMON PEAFOWL
2030*	KNOB-BILLED DUCK *Sarkidiornis melanotus* (Pennant,1769)	COMB DUCK
170	EGYPTIAN GOOSE *Alopochen aegyptiaca* (Linnaeus,1766)	*A. aegyptiacus*
171	RUDDY SHELDUCK *Tadorna ferruginea* (Pallas, 1764)	
186	MALLARD *Anas platyrhynchos* Linnaeus, 1758	
194	NORTHERN SHOVELER *Anas clypeata* Linnaeus, 1758	SHOVELER
202	FERRUGINOUS DUCK *Aythya nyroca* (Güldenstädt, 1770)	
49	AUDUBON'S SHEARWATER *Puffinus lherminieri* Lesson, 1839	PERSIAN SHEARWATER *P (l) persicus*
35	JOUANIN'S PETREL *Bulweria fallax* Jouanin, 1955	
7	LITTLE GREBE *Tachybaptus ruficollis* (Pallas, 1764)	
9	GREAT CRESTED GREBE *Podiceps cristatus* (Linnaeus,1758)	
12	BLACK-NECKED GREBE *Podiceps nigricollis* C. L. Brehm, 1831	
147	GREATER FLAMINGO *Phoenicopterus roseus* Pallas, 1811	*P. ruber*
148*	LESSER FLAMINGO *Phoeniconaias minor* (E. Geoffroy Saint-Hilaire,1798)	*Phoenicopterus minor*
132	ABDIM'S STORK *Ciconia abdimii* M. H. K. Lichtenstein, 1823	
142	SACRED IBIS *Threskiornis aethiopicus* (Latham, 1790)	
144	EURASIAN SPOONBILL *Platalea leucorodia* Linnaeus,1758	SPOONBILL
2044*	AFRICAN SPOONBILL *Platalea alba* Scopoli, 1786	
98	LITTLE BITTERN *Ixobrychus minutus* (Linnaeus,1766)	
99	YELLOW BITTERN *Ixobrychus sinensis* (J. F. Gmelin, 1789)	
104	BLACK-CROWNED NIGHT HERON *Nycticorax nycticorax* (Linnaeus,1758)	NIGHT HERON
107	STRIATED HERON *Butorides striata* (Linnaeus,1758)	LITTLE GREEN HERON *B. striatus*
108	SQUACCO HERON *Ardeola ralloides* (Scopoli, 1769)	
111	CATTLE EGRET *Bubulcus ibis* (Linnaeus,1758)	
122	GREY HERON *Ardea cinerea* Linnaeus,1758	
2031	BLACK-HEADED HERON *Ardea melanocephala* Vigors & Children, 1826	
125	GOLIATH HERON *Ardea goliath* Cretzschmar, 1827	
124	PURPLE HERON *Ardea purpurea* Linnaeus,1766	
118	WESTERN REEF EGRET *Egretta gularis* (Bosc, 1792)	
64	RED-BILLED TROPICBIRD *Phaethon aethereus* Linnaeus,1758	
126	HAMERKOP *Scopus umbretta* J. F. Gmelin, 1789	
88	GREAT WHITE PELICAN *Pelecanus onocrotalus* Linnaeus,1758	WHITE PELICAN
90	PINK-BACKED PELICAN *Pelecanus rufescens* J. F. Gmelin, 1789	
68	MASKED BOOBY *Sula dactylatra* Lesson, 1831	
70	BROWN BOOBY *Sula leucogaster* (Boddaert, 1783)	
72	GREAT CORMORANT *Phalacrocorax carbo* (Linnaeus,1758)	
81	SOCOTRA CORMORANT *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis* Ogilvie-Grant & Forbes, 1899	
303*	LESSER KESTREL *Falco naumanni* Fleischer, 1818	
304	COMMON KESTREL *Falco tinnunculus* Linnaeus,1758	KESTREL
312	SOOTY FALCON *Falco concolor* Temminck, 1825	
314	LANNER FALCON *Falco biarmicus* Temminck, 1825	LANNER
320	PEREGRINE FALCON *Falco peregrinus* Tunstall, 1771	PEREGRINE
321	BARBARY FALCON *Falco pelegrinoides* Temminck, 1829	
301	OSPREY *Pandion haliaetus* (Linnaeus,1758)	(PANDIONIDAE)
235	BLACK-WINGED KITE *Elanus caeruleus* Desfontaines, 1789	BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE
238	BLACK KITE *Milvus migrans* (Boddaert, 1783)	
246	BEARDED VULTURE *Gypaetus barbatus* (Linnaeus,1758)	
247	EGYPTIAN VULTURE *Neophron percnopterus* (Linnaeus,1758)	
253*	RÜPPELL'S VULTURE *Gyps rueppelli* (A. E. Brehm, 1852)	
251	GRIFFON VULTURE *Gyps fulvus* (Hablizl, 1783)	
255*	CINEREOUS VULTURE *Aegypius monachus* (Linnaeus,1766)	BLACK VULTURE
254	LAPPET-FACED VULTURE *Torgos tracheliotus* (J. R. Forster, 1791)	*T. tracheliotos*
256	SHORT-TOED EAGLE *Circaetus gallicus* (J. F. Gmelin, 1788)	
257	BATELEUR *Terathopius ecaudatus* (Daudin, 1800)	
265	DARK CHANTING GOSHAWK *Melierax metabates* Heuglin, 1861	
266	GABAR GOSHAWK *Micronisus gabar* (Daudin, 1800)	
272	SHIKRA *Accipiter badius* (J. F. Gmelin, 1788)	
2034	SOCOTRA BUZZARD *Buteo* 'socotrae'	SOCOTRA BUZZARD *Buteo buteo/tachardus*
288	LONG-LEGGED BUZZARD *Buteo rufinus* (Cretzschmar, 1827)	
294	TAWNY EAGLE *Aquila rapax* (Temminck, 1828)	
296	GOLDEN EAGLE *Aquila chrysaetos* (Linnaeus,1758)	
297	VERREAUX'S EAGLE *Aquila verreauxii* Lesson, 1830	

299	BONELLI'S EAGLE *Hieraaetus fasciatus* (Vieillot, 1822)	
445	ARABIAN BUSTARD *Ardeotis arabs* (Linnaeus,1758)	
444	EASTERN HOUBARA *Chlamydotis macqueenii* (J. E. Gray, 1832)	HOUBARA *C. undulata*
407	WATER RAIL *Rallus aquaticus* Linnaeus,1758	
410	LITTLE CRAKE *Porzana parva* (Scopoli, 1769)	
408	SPOTTED CRAKE *Porzana porzana* (Linnaeus,1766)	
427	PURPLE SWAMPHEN *Porphyrio porphyrio* (Linnaeus,1758)	PURPLE GALLINULE
424	COMMON MOORHEN *Gallinula chloropus* (Linnaeus,1758)	MOORHEN
431*	RED-KNOBBED COOT *Fulica cristata* J. F. Gmelin, 1789	CRESTED COOT
429	COMMON COOT *Fulica atra* Linnaeus,1758	COOT
2036*	GREY CROWNED CRANE *Balearica regulorum* (E. T. Bennett, 1834)	
400	COMMON BUTTONQUAIL *Turnix sylvaticus* (Desfontaines, 1787)	LITTLE BUTTON QUAIL *T. sylvatica*
459	EURASIAN STONE-CURLEW *Burhinus oedicnemus* (Linnaeus,1758)	STONE CURLEW
461	SPOTTED THICK-KNEE *Burhinus capensis* (M. H. K. Lichtenstein, 1823)	
458	CRAB-PLOVER *Dromas ardeola* Paykull, 1805	CRAB PLOVER
455	BLACK-WINGED STILT *Himantopus himantopus* (Linnaeus,1758)	
456	PIED AVOCET *Recurvirostra avosetta* Linnaeus,1758	AVOCET
487	SPUR-WINGED LAPWING *Vanellus spinosus* (Linnaeus,1758)	SPUR-WINGED PLOVER *Hoplopterus spinosus*
490	RED-WATTLED LAPWING *Vanellus indicus* (Boddaert, 1783)	RED-WATTLED PLOVER *Hoplopterus indicus*
492	WHITE-TAILED LAPWING *Vanellus leucurus* (M. H. K. Lichtenstein, 1823)	WHITE-TAILED PLOVER *Chettusia leucura*
469	LITTLE RINGED PLOVER *Charadrius dubius* Scopoli, 1786	
477	KENTISH PLOVER *Charadrius alexandrinus* Linnaeus,1758	
479	GREATER SAND PLOVER *Charadrius leschenaultii* Lesson, 1826	GREATER SANDPLOVER
447	PHEASANT-TAILED JACANA *Hydrophasianus chirurgus* (Scopoli, 1786)	
464	CREAM-COLOURED COURSER *Cursorius cursor* (Latham, 1787)	
465	COLLARED PRATINCOLE *Glareola pratincola* (Linnaeus,1766)	
572	WHITE-EYED GULL *Larus leucophthalmus* Temminck, 1825	
571	SOOTY GULL *Larus hemprichii* Bruch, 1853	
588	SLENDER-BILLED GULL *Larus genei* Brème, 1839	
605	GULL-BILLED TERN *Sterna nilotica* J. F. Gmelin, 1789	(STERNIDAE) *Gelochelidon nilotica*
606	CASPIAN TERN *Sterna caspia* Pallas, 1770	(STERNIDAE)
609	LESSER CRESTED TERN *Sterna bengalensis* Lesson, 1831	(STERNIDAE)
611	SANDWICH TERN *Sterna sandvicensis* Latham, 1787	(STERNIDAE)
608	SWIFT TERN *Sterna bergii* M. H. K. Lichtenstein, 1823	(STERNIDAE)
614	ROSEATE TERN *Sterna dougallii* Montagu, 1813	(STERNIDAE)
620	WHITE-CHEEKED TERN *Sterna repressa* E. Hartert, 1916	(STERNIDAE)
624	LITTLE TERN *Sterna albifrons* Pallas, 1764	(STERNIDAE)
625	SAUNDERS'S TERN *Sterna saundersi* Hume, 1827	(STERNIDAE) SAUNDERS' TERN
622	BRIDLED TERN *Sterna anaethetus* Scopoli, 1786	(STERNIDAE)
623	SOOTY TERN *Sterna fuscata* Linnaeus, 1766	(STERNIDAE)
628	WHITE-WINGED TERN *Chlidonias leucopterus* Temminck, 1815	(STERNIDAE) WHITE-WINGED BLACK TERN
630	BROWN NODDY *Anous stolidus* (Linnaeus,1758)	(STERNIDAE) COMMON NODDY
662	PIN-TAILED SANDGROUSE *Pterocles alchata* (Linnaeus,1766)	
660	CHESTNUT-BELLIED SANDGROUSE *Pterocles exustus* Temminck, 1825	
659	SPOTTED SANDGROUSE *Pterocles senegallus* (Linnaeus,1771)	
658	CROWNED SANDGROUSE *Pterocles coronatus* M. H. K. Lichtenstein, 1823	
657	LICHTENSTEIN'S SANDGROUSE *Pterocles lichtensteinii* Temminck, 1825	
665	ROCK DOVE *Columba livia* J. F. Gmelin, 1789	
670	COMMON WOOD PIGEON *Columba palumbus* Linnaeus,1758	WOOD PIGEON
2009	AFRICAN OLIVE PIGEON *Columba arquatrix* Temminck, 1809	OLIVE PIGEON
687	EUROPEAN TURTLE DOVE *Streptopelia turtur* (Linnaeus,1758)	TURTLE DOVE
688	DUSKY TURTLE DOVE *Streptopelia lugens* (Rüppell, 1837)	
684	EURASIAN COLLARED DOVE *Streptopelia decaocto* (Frivaldszky, 1838)	
683	AFRICAN COLLARED DOVE *Streptopelia roseogrisea* (Sundevall, 1857)	
685	RED-EYED DOVE *Streptopelia semitorquata* (Rüppell, 1837)	
690	LAUGHING DOVE *Streptopelia senegalensis* (Linnaeus,1766)	PALM DOVE
692	NAMAQUA DOVE *Oena capensis* (Linnaeus,1766)	
703	BRUCE'S GREEN PIGEON *Treron waalia* (F. A. A. Meyer, 1793)	
2017*	SULPHUR-CRESTED COCKATOO *Cacatua galerita* (Latham, 1790)	
2008*	BUDGERIGAR *Melopsittacus undulatus* (Shaw, 1805)	
2024	ALEXANDRINE PARAKEET *Psittacula eupatria* (Linnaeus,1766)	
712	ROSE-RINGED PARAKEET *Psittacula krameri* (Scopoli, 1769)	
715	JACOBIN CUCKOO *Clamator jacobinus* (Boddaert, 1783)	
724*	COMMON CUCKOO *Cuculus canorus* Linnaeus,1758	EURASIAN CUCKOO
721	KLAAS'S CUCKOO *Chrysococcyx klaas* (Stephens, 1815)	
720	DIDERIC CUCKOO *Chrysococcyx caprius* (Boddaert, 1783)	DIDRIC CUCKOO
2002	WHITE-BROWED COUCAL *Centropus superciliosus* Hemprich & Ehrenberg, 1833	
735	BARN OWL *Tyto alba* (Scopoli, 1769)	
738	PALLID SCOPS OWL *Otus brucei* (Hume, 1873)	BRUCE'S SCOPS OWL
2003	AFRICAN SCOPS OWL *Otus senegalensis* (Swainson, 1837)	
2033	SOCOTRA SCOPS OWL *Otus socotranus* Ogilvie-Grant & Forbes, 1899	
744	DESERT EAGLE-OWL *Bubo ascalaphus* Savigny, 1809	EAGLE OWL *B. bubo*
745	SPOTTED EAGLE-OWL *Bubo africanus* (Temminck, 1821)	
762	HUME'S OWL *Strix butleri* (Hume, 1878)	
757	LITTLE OWL *Athene noctua* (Scopoli, 1769)	
773	NUBIAN NIGHTJAR *Caprimulgus nubicus* M. H. K. Lichtenstein, 1823	
2018	MONTANE NIGHTJAR *Caprimulgus poliocephalus* Rüppell,1840	MOUNTAIN NIGHTJAR
772	PLAIN NIGHTJAR *Caprimulgus inornatus* Heuglin, 1869	
802	AFRICAN PALM SWIFT *Cypsiurus parvus* (M. H. K. Lichtenstein, 1823)	PALM SWIFT
798	ALPINE SWIFT *Tachymarptis melba* (Linnaeus, 1758)	*Apus melba*

796	PALLID SWIFT *Apus pallidus* (Shelley, 1870)	
2038	FORBES-WATSON'S SWIFT *Apus berliozi* Ripley, 1965	
800	LITTLE SWIFT *Apus affinis* (J. E. Gray, 1860)	
843	INDIAN ROLLER *Coracias benghalensis* (Linnaeus, 1758)	
842	ABYSSINIAN ROLLER *Coracias abyssinicus* Hermann, 1783	
841	EUROPEAN ROLLER *Coracias garrulus* Linnaeus, 1758	
827	WHITE-THROATED KINGFISHER *Halcyon smyrnensis* (Linnaeus, 1758)	WHITE-BREASTED KINGFISHER
829	GREY-HEADED KINGFISHER *Halcyon leucocephala* (Statius Müller, 1776)	
2004	COLLARED KINGFISHER *Todiramphus chloris* (Boddaert, 1783)	WHITE-COLLARED KINGFISHER *Halcyon chloris*
2005*	MALACHITE KINGFISHER *Alcedo cristata* Pallas, 1764	
831*	COMMON KINGFISHER *Alcedo atthis* (Linnaeus, 1758)	EURASIAN KINGFISHER
837	WHITE-THROATED BEE-EATER *Merops albicollis* Vieillot, 1817	
838	GREEN BEE-EATER *Merops orientalis* Latham, 1802	LITTLE GREEN BEE-EATER
839	BLUE-CHEEKED BEE-EATER *Merops persicus* Pallas, 1773	
840	EUROPEAN BEE-EATER *Merops apiaster* Linnaeus, 1758	
846	EURASIAN HOOPOE *Upupa epops* Linnaeus, 1758	HOOPOE
847	AFRICAN GREY HORNBILL *Tockus nasutus* (Linnaeus, 1766)	LITTLE GREY HORNBILL
890	ARABIAN WOODPECKER *Dendrocopos dorae* (Bates & Kinnear, 1935)	
1509	BLACK-CROWNED TCHAGRA *Tchagra senegalus* (Linnaeus, 1766)	(LANIIDAE) BLACK-HEADED BUSH SHRIKE
1514	ISABELLINE SHRIKE *Lanius isabellinus* Hemprieh & Ehrenberg, 1833	
1516	BAY-BACKED SHRIKE *Lanius vittatus* Valeneiennes, 1826	
1520	SOUTHERN GREY SHRIKE *Lanius meridionalis* Temminck, 1820	GREAT GREY SHRIKE *L. excubitor*
1523	WOODCHAT SHRIKE *Lanius senator* Linnaeus, 1758	
1508	EURASIAN GOLDEN ORIOLE *Oriolus oriolus* (Linnaeus, 1758)	GOLDEN ORIOLE
1353	AFRICAN PARADISE FLYCATCHER *Terpsiphone viridis* (Statius Müller, 1776)	
1549	EURASIAN MAGPIE *Pica pica* (Linnaeus, 1758)	MAGPIE
1562	HOUSE CROW *Corvus splendens* Vieillot, 1817	
1571	BROWN-NECKED RAVEN *Corvus ruficollis* Lesson, 1830	
1574	FAN-TAILED RAVEN *Corvus rhipidurus* E. Hartert, 1918	
992*	BARN SWALLOW *Hirundo rustica* Linnaeus, 1758	SWALLOW
2072*	ETHIOPIAN SWALLOW *Hirundo aethiopica* Blanford, 1869	
990	PALE CRAG MARTIN *Ptyonoprogne obsoleta* (Cabanis, 1850)	AFRICAN ROCK MARTIN *P. fuligula*
995	RED-RUMPED SWALLOW *Cecropis duarica* (Laxmann, 1769)	*Hirundo daurica*
952	SINGING BUSH LARK *Mirafra cantillans* Blyth, 1845	
958	GREATER HOOPOE-LARK *Alaemon alaudipes* (Desfontaines, 1789)	HOOPOE LARK
960	THICK-BILLED LARK *Ramphocoris clotbey* (Bonaparte, 1850)	
962	BIMACULATED LARK *Melanocorypha bimaculata* (Ménétriés, 1832)	
955	BAR-TAILED LARK *Ammomanes cinctura* (Gould, 1839)	BAR-TAILED DESERT LARK *A. cincturus*
957	DESERT LARK *Ammomanes deserti* (M. H. K. Liehtenstein, 1823)	
968	GREATER SHORT-TOED LARK *Calandrella brachydactyla* (Leisler, 1814)	SHORT-TOED LARK
967	BLANFORD'S SHORT-TOED LARK *Calandrella blanfordi* (Shelley, 1902)	RED-CAPPED LARK *C. cinerea*
970	LESSER SHORT-TOED LARK *Calandrella rufescens* (Vieillot, 1820)	
954	DUNN'S LARK *Eremalauda dunni* (Shelley, 1904)	
972	CRESTED LARK *Galerida cristata* (Linnaeus, 1758)	
953	BLACK-CROWNED SPARROW-LARK *Eremopterix nigriceps* (Gould, 1839)	BLACK-CROWNED FINCH LARK
979	TEMMINCK'S LARK *Eremophila bilopha* (Temminck, 1823)	TEMMINCK'S HORNED LARK
1226	ZITTING CISTICOLA *Cisticola juncidis* (Rafinesque, 1810)	(SYLVIIDAE) FAN-TAILED WARBLER
2016	SOCOTRA CISTICOLA *Cisticola haesitatus* (Selater & Hautlaub, 1881)	(SYLVIIDAE)
2015	SOCOTRA WARBLER *Incana incana* (Selater & Hautlaub, 1881)	(SYLVIIDAE)
1231	SCRUB WARBLER *Scotocerca inquieta* (Cretzsehmar, 1827)	(SYLVIIDAE)
1227	GRACEFUL PRINIA *Prinia gracilis* (M. H. K. Lichtenstein, 1823)	(SYLVIIDAE) GRACEFUL WARBLER
2007	RED-WHISKERED BULBUL *Pycnonotus jocosus* (Linnaeus, 1758)	
1035	WHITE-CHEEKED BULBUL *Pycnonotus leucogenys* (J. E. Gray, 1835)	
2006	RED-VENTED BULBUL *Pycnonotus cafer* (Linnaeus, 1766)	
1036	WHITE-SPECTACLED BULBUL *Pycnonotus xanthopygos* (Hemprieh & Ehrenberg, 1833)	YELLOW-VENTED BULBUL
1220*	CETTI'S WARBLER *Cettia cetti* (Temminck, 1820)	
1238	SAVI'S WARBLER *Locustella luscinioides* (Savi, 1824)	
2048	BASRA REED WARBLER *Acrocephalus griseldis* (Hartlaub, 1891)	
1253	GREAT REED WARBLER *Acrocephalus arundinaceus* (Linnaeus, 1758)	
1252	CLAMOROUS REED WARBLER *Acrocephalus stentoreus* (Hemprieh & Ehrenberg, 1833)	CLAMOROUS WARBLER
1241	MOUSTACHED WARBLER *Acrocephalus melanopogon* (Temminek, 1823)	
1251	EURASIAN REED WARBLER *Acrocephalus scirpaceus* (Hermann, 1804)	REED WARBLER
2021	RED SEA REED WARBLER *Acrocephalus avicenniae* Ash, Pearson, Nikolaus & Colston, 1989	AFRICAN REED WARBLER *A. baeticatus*
1256	SYKES'S WARBLER *Hippolais rama* (Sykes, 1832)	BOOTED WARBLER *H. caligata*
1255	EASTERN OLIVACEOUS WARBLER *Hippolais pallida* (Hemprich & Ehrenberg, 1833)	OLIVACEOUS WARBLER
1281	BROWN WOODLAND WARBLER *Phylloscopus umbrovirens* (Rüppell, 1840)	
1271	ARABIAN WARBLER *Sylvia leucomelaena* (Hemprieh & Ehrenberg, 1833)	
1225	YEMEN WARBLER *Parisoma buryi* Ogilvie-Grant, 1913	
1378	COMMON BABBLER *Turdoides caudata* (Dumont, 1823)	*T. caudatus*
1379	ARABIAN BABBLER *Turdoides squamiceps* (Cretzsehmar, 1827)	
1501	ORIENTAL WHITE-EYE *Zosterops palpebrosus* (Temminek, 1824)	*Z. palpebrosa*
1504	ABYSSINIAN WHITE-EYE *Zosterops abyssinicus* Guérin-Méneville, 1843	WHITE-BREASTED WHITE-EYE *Z. abyssinica*
1588	BANK MYNA *Acridotheres ginginianus* (Latham, 1790)	BANK MYNAH
1587	COMMON MYNA *Acridotheres tristis* (Linnaeus, 1766)	COMMON MYNAH
2039	PIED MYNA *Sturnus contra* Linnaeus, 1758	PIED MYNAH
1577	BRAHMINY STARLING *Sturnus pagodarum* (J. F. Gmelin, 1789)	BRAHMINY MYNAH
1582	COMMON STARLING *Sturnus vulgaris* Linnaeus, 1758	EURASIAN STARLING
2026*	SUPERB STARLING *Lamprotornis superbus* (Rüppell, 1845)	
1576	VIOLET-BACKED STARLING *Cinnyricinclus leucogaster* (Boddaert, 1783)	AMETHYST STARLING
2011	SOMALI STARLING *Onychognathus blythii* (Hartlaub, 1859)	BROWN WINGED GRACKLE

2010	SOCOTRA STARLING *Onychognathus frater* (Sclater & Hartlaub, 1881)	SOCOTRA GRACKLE
1575	TRISTRAM'S STARLING *Onychognathus tristramii* (P. L. Sclater, 1858)	TRISTRAM'S GRACKLE
1182	YEMEN THRUSH *Turdus menachensis* (Ogilvie-Grant, 1913	
1095	RUFOUS-TAILED SCRUB ROBIN *Cercotrichas galactotes* (Temminck, 1820)	(TURDIDAE) RUFOUS BUSH CHAT
1096	BLACK SCRUB ROBIN *Cercotrichas podobe* (Statius Müller, 1776)	(TURDIDAE) BLACK BUSH CHAT
1139	COMMON STONECHAT *Saxicola torquatus* (Linnaeus, 1776)	(TURDIDAE) STONECHAT *S. torquata*
1151*	RED-RUMPED WHEATEAR *Oenanthe moesta* (M. H. K. Lichtenstein, 1823)	(TURDIDAE)
1145	RED-BREASTED WHEATEAR *Oenanthe bottae* (Bonaparte, 1854)	(TURDIDAE)
1144*	ISABELLINE WHEATEAR *Oenanthe isabellina* (Temminck, 1829)	(TURDIDAE)
1149	DESERT WHEATEAR *Oenanthe deserti* (Temminck, 1825)	(TURDIDAE)
1154	MOURNING WHEATEAR *Oenanthe lugens* (M. H. K. Lichtenstein, 1823)	(TURDIDAE)
2020	ARABIAN WHEATEAR *Oenanthe lugentoides* (Seebohm, 1881)	(TURDIDAE) SOUTH ARABIAN WHEATEAR
1156	HUME'S WHEATEAR *Oenanthe albonigra* (Hume, 1872)	(TURDIDAE) *O. alboniger*
1157	WHITE-CROWNED WHEATEAR *Oenanthe leucopyga* (C. L. Brehm, 1855)	(TURDIDAE) WHITE-CROWNED BLACK WHEATEAR
1155	HOODED WHEATEAR *Oenanthe monacha* (Temminck, 1825)	(TURDIDAE)
1135	BLACKSTART *Cercomela melanura* (Temminck, 1824)	(TURDIDAE)
1161	LITTLE ROCK THRUSH *Monticola rufocinereus* (Rüppell, 1837)	(TURDIDAE) *M. rufocinerea*
1336	GAMBAGA FLYCATCHER *Muscicapa gambagae* (Alexander, 1901)	
1492	NILE VALLEY SUNBIRD *Hedydipna metallica* (M. H. K. Lichtenstein, 1823)	*Anthreptes metallicus*
2014	SOCOTRA SUNBIRD *Chalcomitra balfouri* (Sclater & Hartlaub, 1881)	*Nectarinia balfouri*
1495	PALESTINE SUNBIRD *Cinnyris osea* Bonaparte, 1856	ORANGE-TUFTED SUNBIRD *Nectarinia osea*
1494	SHINING SUNBIRD *Cinnyris habessinicus* (Hemprich & Ehrenberg, 1828)	*Nectarinia habessinica*
1493	PURPLE SUNBIRD *Cinnyris asiaticus* (Latham, 1790)	*Nectarinia asiatica*
1591	HOUSE SPARROW *Passer domesticus* (Linnaeus, 1758)	
1592	SPANISH SPARROW *Passer hispaniolensis* (Temminck, 1820)	
2012	SOCOTRA SPARROW *Passer insularis* Sclater & Hartlaub, 1881	AFRICAN RUFOUS SPARROW *Passer motitensis*
2073	ABD EL KURI SPARROW *Passer hemileucus* Ogilvie-Grant & Forbes, 1899	AFRICAN RUFOUS SPARROW *Passer motitensis*
1600	ARABIAN GOLDEN SPARROW *Passer euchlorus* (Bonaparte, 1850)	
1601	PALE ROCKFINCH *Carpospiza brachydactyla* (Bonaparte, 1850)	PALE ROCK SPARROW *Petronia brachydactyla*
1603	BUSH PETRONIA *Gymnoris dentata* (Sundevall, 1850)	LESSER ROCK SPARROW *Petronia dentata*
1602	YELLOW-THROATED SPARROW *Gymnoris xanthocollis* (E. Burton, 1838)	*Petronia xanthocollis*
1612	RÜPPELL'S WEAVER *Ploceus galbula* Rüppell, 1840	
2040	LESSER MASKED WEAVER *Ploceus intermedius* Rüppell, 1845	
2065*	VILLAGE WEAVER *Ploceus cucullatus* (Statius Müller, 1776)	
2053	GOLDEN-BACKED WEAVER *Ploceus jacksoni* Shelley, 1888	
2028	STREAKED WEAVER *Ploceus manyar* (Horsfield, 1822)	
2019	BAYA WEAVER *Ploceus philippinus* (Linnaeus, 1766)	
2063	RED FODY *Foudia madagascariensis* (Linnaeus, 1766)	MADAGASCAN RED FODY
2071*	YELLOW-CROWNED BISHOP *Euplectes afer* (J. F. Gmelin, 1789)	
2052*	SOUTHERN RED BISHOP *Euplectes orix* (Linnaeus, 1758)	
1616	ARABIAN WAXBILL *Estrilda rufibarba* (Cabanis, 1851)	
2029	RED AVADAVAT *Amandava amandava* (Linnaeus, 1758)	AVADAVAT
1617	ORANGE-BREASTED WAXBILL *Amandava subflava* (Vieillot, 1819)	ZEBRA WAXBILL
1619	AFRICAN SILVERBILL *Lonchura cantans* (J. F. Gmelin, 1789)	*Euodice cantans*
1618	INDIAN SILVERBILL *Lonchura malabarica* (Linnaeus, 1758)	*Euodice malabarica*
2042	SCALY-BREASTED MUNIA *Lonchura punctulata* (Linnaeus, 1758)	
1089	ARABIAN ACCENTOR *Prunella fagani* (Ogilvie-Grant, 1913)	
1017	YELLOW WAGTAIL *Motacilla flava* Linnaeus, 1758	
1002	AFRICAN PIPIT *Anthus cinnamomeus* Rüppell, 1840	RICHARD'S PIPIT *A. novaeseelandiae*
1007	LONG-BILLED PIPIT *Anthus similis* Jerdon, 1840	
1645	ARABIAN SERIN *Serinus rothschildi* Ogilvie-Grant, 1902	
1646	YEMEN SERIN *Serinus menachensis* (Ogilvie-Grant, 1913)	
1647	GOLDEN-WINGED GROSBEAK *Rhynchostruthus socotranus* Sclater & Hartlaub, 1881	
1653	EURASIAN GOLDFINCH *Carduelis carduelis* (Linnaeus, 1758)	GOLDFINCH
1661	YEMEN LINNET *Carduelis yemenensis* (Ogilvie-Grant, 1913)	
1676	TRUMPETER FINCH *Bucanetes githagineus* (M. H. K. Lichtenstein, 1823)	
1674	DESERT FINCH *Rhodospiza obsoleta* (M. H. K. Lichtenstein, 1823)	
1688	SINAI ROSEFINCH *Carpodacus synoicus* (Temminck, 1825)	
1882	CORN BUNTING *Emberiza calandra* Linnaeus, 1758	*Miliaria calandra*
1863	HOUSE BUNTING *Emberiza striolata* (M. H. K. Lichtenstein, 1823)	
1864	CINNAMON-BREASTED BUNTING *Emberiza tahapisi* A. Smith, 1836	CINNAMON-BREASTED ROCK BUNTING
2013	SOCOTRA BUNTING *Emberiza socotrana* (Ogilvie-Grant & Forbes, 1899)	

Notes

A. Species identification numbers used during the data collection phase follow the sequence of the Voous List (Voous 1977) except those species from outside the Palearctic region (mainly exotics) that have since been found breeding in Arabia; these start a sequence beginning with No 2001. Species with an asterisk (*) after the number are not confirmed breeding species or breed/have bred, in sheltered environments.

B. Preferred English names generally follow Gill and Wright (2006), and the scientific nomenclature and order mostly follow Dickinson, 2003.

C. Changed taxonomic opinion has meant that some taxa are now recognised under a different specific name (or the name has been changed slightly to correct Latin suffixes) or they have been placed in a different genus, some have even been placed in different family (or sub families have been elevated to family level) since the appearance of the Voous List (Voous 1977). The family, generic and specific names followed during the data collection phase of the atlas as used by Voous are shown where different. NB The taxonomy of the Socotra Buzzard and Socotra Scops Owl are not settled.

D For a number of species the preferred English name as used by ABBA has changed since the start of the data collection phase. These changes are largely due to the international efforts to rationalise English bird names. Often this has meant that a geographical or descriptive prefix has been added to the name used previously to differentiate one species from another where they have the same or similar names in different parts of the world. Sometimes the change has merely been a format change such as the gaining or loss of a hyphen and in other instances spellings are corrected or rationalised.

Clockwise from top left:

Cave explorers in Arabia have discovered a hitherto untouched bird habitats. Caves provide undisturbed nesting places for a number of species notably owls, swifts and Rock Doves *Columba livia*. Arabian cave explorers have coined a completely new speleological term the 'guanomite', a tower of bird droppings that has perhaps built up over centuries. See page 14. (Photo: John and Susy Pint).

The observation tower of the Aden Marsh reserve allows groups of observers a 360° view of the marsh, and opportunities to watch raptor migration along of the Gulf of Aden. See page 18. (Photo: MCJ).

A significant proportion of the small world population of the Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor* breeds around Arabia. New studies seek to assess changes in the population in recent years. Here a brood of three proudly show their PITs. See 'Announcements' page 6 and pilot survey results page 7. (Photo: Mike McGrady).

A sawscale viper *Echis* sp. swallows an Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina*, east of Aden, November 2007. See page 23. (Photo: MCJ).

It occupies an area of 3 km². In the centre of the reserve a shallow pool has formed as a result of an inflow of treated sewage water from Jahra. The reed *Phragmites australis* grows all year round and creates an attractive natural environment for both local and migrant birds. Away from the immediate water margin the reserve is dominated by halophytic plants such as *Tamarix sp.* and *Suaeda aegyptiaca.*

In September 1993 Charles Pilcher recorded that a pair of Little Grebe bred successfully in the reserve and also on an unrecorded date in 1996 (Gregory,2005). The Little Grebe was found breeding again at Jahra Pool Reserve on 23 July 2006 when during daily monitoring I observed a group of five individuals swimming in a minor pool, about 25cm in depth. It was clear that one of them was an adult and the others were young birds. I saw them up to three days later but not subsequently.

References: • Al Ghanem, K & Al Shehabi, Y. 2006. *The Birds of Jahra Pool Reserve* (In Arabic) Environment Public Authority, Kuwait. • Evans, M I (1994) *Important bird areas in the Middle East.* BirdLife international, Cambridge, UK. • Gregory, G (2005) The Birds of the State of Kuwait. Privately published, Skegness, England 2005.

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NB The species bred again in 2007 at Jahra Pool Reserve and at Doha South reedbeds. See photo page12.

Birds in Caves

John and Susy Pint are leaders in the exploration of caves in Arabia (see their website *http://www.saudicaves.com* for details of some amazing underground places and adventures) and have reported a number of interesting bird observations during their speleological pursuits. For example in Habikah cave (JA36) in north-western Saudi Arabia, and other caves that had never been visited by animals or humans, Rock Doves *Columba livia* regularly nest on the floor of caves, obviously they feel safe enough to do so in such environments. They have also found hundreds of Rock Doves breeding 100 m below the surface in the vertical hole of Dharb al Najem (LA28), near Majma'a in central Saudi Arabia and nesting 75 m below the surface on the floor of the Dahl Abalhol (OB26) located 206 km east of Riyadh. In fact Arabian Rock Doves are the inspiration for a completely new speleological term 'guanomites'. These are curious dove dropping stalagmites that grow below roof sites up to a man's height on the dry undisturbed floor or desert caves and are probably hundreds, if not thousands, of years in the making. (See photo page 13). They also report an Ostrich *Struthio camelus* feather about 100 m from the entrance in Dahl Shawyah cave (NA29), which, from the isolation of the hole had probably been there since Ostriehes roamed the desert above. They also found Ostrich egg shell fragments near the entrance to Kahf al Shuyamis (GA29) lava tube (see note below), 202 km north-east of Medina. The Pints have also explored the longest lava tubes that exist in the Middle East in the harrats of western Arabia, including one in the Harrat Khaybar (FB27), which turned up swifts nesting 20 m into the tube (swift species not determined) as well as several reports of owls, not to mention wolves and hyaenas.

Caves are very often undisturbed, ancient and special habitats and although there are no records from Arabia of birds penetrating deep into caves, to live or breed in total darkness, like the Oilbird *Steatornis caripensis* of South America, a number of species are shown on the ABBA database as breeding in caves in Arabia. Pallid Swifts *Apus pallidus* are well known to nest in the roof of the famous Dahl Hit (NA25) just south of Riyadh. (This was the cave where Abdulaziz Ibn Saud watered his camels and his men rested the night before he captured Riyadh early in the 20th century). Little Swifts *Apus affinis* have been reported nesting in cave ceilings in Yemen and the Hedjaz. Forbes-Watson's Swift *Apus berliozi* nest in small coastal caves in Dhofar and Socotra.

As might be imagined, owls are regular cave goers, the first Hume's Owl *Strix butleri* recorded in central Arabia in the 1970s was found roosting inside a 10 m long cave, Barn Owls *Tyto alba* have been found in a cave on 'the jebal' of Bahrain, Spotted Eagle Owls *Bubo africanus* have been collected from a cave in the Hedjaz and Desert Eagle Owl *Bubo ascalaphus* collected from caves in the Eastern Province. Perhaps the most commonly recorded cave dwelling owl is the Little Owl *Athene noctua* which has been reported from this habitat in western and central Saudi Arabia and at Dahl al Misfir (RA27) cave Qatar. The ceiling of many caves are also particularly favoured nesting sites of Pale Crag Martin *Pytonoprogne obsoleta* and Red -rumped Swallow *Cecropis duarica.* On Socotra both the Socotra and Somali Starlings *Onychognathus blythii* (like Tristram's Starling *O. tristramii* on the mainland), have used caves for nesting and the sea facing caves and fissures of the island are the only known breeding sites for the endemic Jouanin's Petrel *Bulweria fallax.* Local people used to harvest them and have reported that they could take 30 young from a single good cave in a night.

A whole range of raptors find inaccessible caves good places to breed and roost and there are breeding records of Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*, Bonelli's Eagle *Hieraaetus fasciatus,* Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*, as well as four species of falcon, Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*,

Rock Doves *Columba livia* often breed in caves and are the inspiration for a new speleological term.

Sooty Falcon *F. concolor*, Lanner *F. biarmicus* and Barbary *F. pelegrinoides*.

Perhaps the most famous bird cave is Tawi Atair (UA11) in southern Oman, a vertical sinkhole with water at the bottom that has created (or retained) a special shady habitat which was, for a long time, was the only place outside of Yemen that the Yemen Serin *Serinus yemenensis* could be found, 1000 km from its homeland. The serins seem to spend their lives in or around the hole, nesting in its crevices, finding food and drinking from stalactites.

Note: Lava tubes are formed when molten lava runs downhill during an eruption, as the stream becomes solidified on the surface, the flow continues like a drainpipe underground and if the supply suddenly stops the liquid lava runs out of the bottom leaving an empty tube. Some of these tubes in Arabia have been 3 km long and over 40 m deep.

Introduced Fauna : Crocodiles

By Peter Hellyer

Introduced crocodile species have been reported on several occasions in the northern UAE, both by members of the public, who informed the local media, and by birdwatchers and naturalists. The precise species is not known, and all reports are believed to relate to individual animals that had originally been bought as pets, but which had escaped or been released into the wild when they became too large to keep in a household. Although trade in crocodiles is officially regulated under the terms of the CITES convention, to which the UAE is a signatory, enforcement is somewhat patchy.

Reports have come from four areas - two in the Emirate of Sharjah and one each in the Emirates of Umm al Qaiwain and Ra's al-Khaimah.

In Sharjah, several unsubstantiated reports from the late 1990s and early 2000s related to crocodiles of over one metre in length being seen in small irrigation ditches near the inland agricultural centre of Dhaid. In 2005 and 2006, there were also two reports of a single animal, again in excess of one metre in length, being seen by birdwatchers in an area of excavated pits, pools and rubbish dumps adjacent to Sharjah University City, on the outskirts of Sharjah itself. Efforts by the Sharjah Environment and Protected Areas Authority, and the local police to find the animal and to kill or capture it, met with no success. The pools in this area have now been filled in.

In Umm al Qaiwain, there have also been unsubstantiated reports of at least one 'large' crocodile being seen on the shores of the Khor al-Beida lagoon. If this animal was able to survive in saltwater habitat, it may possibly have been of a different species from those seen in the inland, freshwater, habitats.

In January 2007, a young crocodile was reported from beaches in Rams, in the north of Ra's al-Khaimah. It was eventually captured and returned to its owner, who had purchased it from a local pet shop. It had apparently escaped from a pool he had built at his seaside home. He was quoted by the UAE media as saying that some local families had 'pet' crocodiles of up to five metres in length.

Crocodiles are not naturally present in the UAE, although fossil bones of crocodilians from the Late Miocene period, 5 - 6 million years ago, have been found in the Western Region of Abu Dhabi. A sub-fossil crocodile skull apparently similar to the Nile crocodile has also been identified in salt-flat sediments in the Sabkhat Matti in the extreme west of Abu Dhabi, in an area where flows of fresh water from the Rub al-Khali (Empty Quarter) reached the Arabian Gulf during the Pleistocene and, perhaps, into the early Holocene, until the onset of greater aridity around 6,000 years ago. This suggests that crocodiles may have continued to be present, along with other large mammal water-dwelling fauna, in the Empty Quarter until at least late in the Pleistocene.

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Editor's comment: A few years ago there were reports of crocodiles seen at coastal wetlands near Jeddah and in 2007 a number were found at an inland pool on a farm in Kuwait. Clearly birdwatchers had better watch out!

New Books

Phoenix aims to provide details of all new publications which are relevant to birds and wildlife in Arabia or generally to the Arabian/Middle East environment. Titles mentioned are usually available in good book shops in Arabia, Europe and North America. Others are on restricted distribution or privately published and readers wishing to obtain copies should contact the author, publisher or distributor mentioned. When ordering through a library or agent quote the ISBN or ISSN number, if given. The prices shown against titles are published prices but may include post and packaging. Recommendations made about books are based on the standard of treatment of the subject, format and quality of contents. A recommendation does not necessarily mean good value for money. Readers are asked to provide details of other new, relevant titles not mentioned in this survey.

Discovering Qatar by Frances Gillespie (2006)

Those interested in the wildlife and environment of Arabia will know that there are very few titles available which are specific to the State of Qatar, these include a short narrative privately printed account of the birds and a book on the plants, both decades old. Therefore this introduction to the Qatar environment, in its widest sense, including history and archeology (the author's specialism), arab traditional life, plants and animals both terrestrial and marine, is very welcome. It is more a collection of essays on a range of separate subjects than a systematic approach but it covers most of the subjects one would expect from an introduction to a country and a few surprising additions. Subjects in the history/prehistory vein include local archeological discoveries and rock carvings, the arab tradition subjects include pearling in the Arabian Gulf, boats and boat building, forts, bedouin life, camels and truffle hunting. There are notes for geographers on sand dunes and their formation. Articles on terrestrial wildlife cover small mammals, foxes, hedgehogs, hares, snakes and other reptiles and some unpleasant arachnids, There is no overview of birds but good notes on Osprey and Socotra Cormorants, two important species in the region. Marine wildlife includes details of turtles, seas snakes, some dangerous fish, dugongs, whales and dolphins to be found around Qatar. This book is well illustrated with at least two colour photos to the opening and includes several old black and white photos to illustrate some traditional aspects of the way of life of the Qataris of yesteryear. Whilst the broad range of subjects covered will not satisfy the 'expert' the book will certainly be very valuable to the increasing numbers of short term visitors to the state and it is recommended as an introduction to everyone planning such a visit to Qatar.

Card covers , 20X27 cm, 156 pages. Price QAR 100 (or about £14, Euro 21, $28) when ordered direct from the author at gillespi@qatar.net.qa . *Copies in bookshops and some of the larger suppliers will be a little more expensive. Sponsored by RasGas Company Limited and Published by Creative Writing and Photography, Rimons, France. ISBN 99921-70-32-8.*

Grey Shrikes are just not Black and White

By Simon Aspinall and John Norton

The taxonomy of the large 'grey' shrikes is in a state of flux, and well it might be, even if Southern Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis*, the species breeding in Arabia (as well as southern Europe and North Africa) has now been firmly separated from the more northerly Great Grey Shrike *L. excubitor*. As for the Steppe Grey Shrike *L. m. pallidirostris*, another form well known in Arabia, it seems this might actually belong amongst the Great Grey Shrikes instead of, as at present, the Southern Grey *meridionalis* clan.

This situation will have to be left to a DNA study to resolve, but with regard to the ABBA project it is evident that we ought to pay more attention to identifying each of these 'forms'. The Steppe Grey Shrike is a regular passage migrant and winter visitor to much of the Arabian Peninsula, while the resident forms of Southern Grey Shrike, *L. m. aucheri* in the southern Gulf often fledges its first brood before the former has even left northbound in the early spring.

The forms are not necessarily that straightforward to separate, especially in the shimmer and heat haze, and particularly as wintering *pallidirostris* maintain winter territories (into March) and will sing. Some *aucheri* of Iranian stock are also likely to be wintering in the region. Moreover, only recently, it appears that genuine Great Grey Shrikes are also to be found, at least in the Gulf region. As a consequence the ABBA species distribution map could easily contain contentious breeding range information if all presence records (small dots) are displayed.

In the UAE in 2006 the first live individual of Great Grey Shrike was confirmed in Abu Dhabi city some nine years after a dead specimen had been recovered on Das island on 29 October 1998. The following winter, 2006/7, two individuals were found, both on Abu Dhabi island, one probably being a returning bird in the same site as occupied in the previous winter. All birds were of a white-winged form, presumed to be *homeyeri* (rather than *leucopterus*) and presented a subtle identification challenge unless seen well.

In 2007 the authors had the opportunity to work in the Dukhan area of south-west Qatar in March and during their three week stay there many individuals of three different forms of grey shrike were recorded:

i. Southern Grey Shrike. The local breeding form of Southern Grey Shrike appeared (to SA), to be too pale above to be *aucheri*, and also lacked the black over the bill base of that form. They were, however, clearly Southern Grey Shrikes; some being seen with newly-fledged young by late in the month.

ii. Steppe Grey Shrike. Only a few were conclusively identified. This race, which can be confused with juvenile Southern Grey Shrikes, is the form most likely to be confused with Great Grey Shrike. It does indeed have a pale based rostris (bill), but this actually turns solidly black for the breeding season - often the case before leaving their winter quarters. The upperparts are particularly pale grey, the secondaries being dark, with the white wing patch restricted to the primaries.

iii. Great Grey Shrike. At least four different individuals were noted, with perhaps many more being present, although it wasn't always possible to scrutinize all individuals. Nonetheless, all four of those recorded were attributable to a white-winged race, presumed to be *homeyeri*, with the characteristic black and white piano keys across the secondaries (the inner webs being white, the outer webs dark) and with three pairs of outer tail feathers appearing solidly white.

The latter sightings of Great Grey Shrike apparently constitute the first records for Qatar.

Three forms of grey shrike in one small area is hard to explain, even if they do have different breeding areas. The Southern Grey Shrike is the only species/form breeding in the southern Gulf, indeed within the Arabian peninsula, but the possibility of confusion with the other, wintering or passage, forms is a real possibility and strong evidence of breeding should be sought whenever suspected, or identification of the form be attempted. The fact that those birds breeding in Qatar are somewhat less obvious than, for example, *aucheri* in UAE, necessitates particular caution by field workers.

Qatar, with its predominantly rocky habitat and ample bushes and trees, particularly of *Lycium shawii* and *Acacia tortilis*, providing suitable lookouts, can be considered almost ideal for shrikes and their numbers reflect this suitability. Prey found in 'grey' shrike larders included House Sparrow *Passer domesticus* pulli, Baluchistan Gerbil *Gerbillus nanus* and Short-nosed Lizard *Mesalina brevirostris*, with darkling beetles (Tenebrionids) abundant in innumerable pellets examined, although any particular dietary preference of the different forms of shrike remains to be examined.

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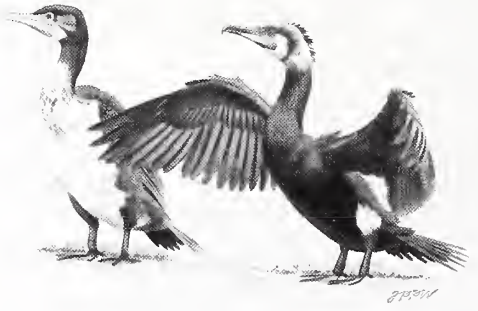
Editor's comment: It is intended that in the final atlas the maps for breeding species which also have a non-breeding population (of which Southern Grey Shrike is a good example) will only show probable and confirmed breeding records, thus avoiding mere presence records distorting the apparent breeding range.



Breeding of Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* was reported from Bahrain during 2007 (See page 1)

Unusual Kleptoparasitism?

By Michael C Jennings

Many birds will often try to get an easy meal by bullying another, usually smaller, species to give up its food. The habit is especially prevalent among seabirds. During a recent visit to Yemen I witnessed two incidents (November 2007) which appeared to be very unusual Kleptoparasitism attempts.

Firstly on 9 November on the coast near the Bab al Mandab (JB02) I was watching an immature Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster* some 2-300 m offshore when it momentarily chased an Audubon's Shearwater *Puffinus lherminieri*. I could not see why the booby gave chase, perhaps the shearwater had just taken a food item but the short chase was viewed seriously by the shearwater which immediately dived into the sea. Unfortunately wave action prevented me from seeing whether it actually went underwater. The booby flew on. I did not see the shearwater re-appear.

The other occasion was at Ibn Abbas village (IB07) north of Hodeidah on 12 November. Fishermen had dumped some unwanted sardines overboard and a throng of gulls were squabbling noisily over them, most fish appeared a little too big for the gulls to swallow on the spot and several were flying off with their prize. A Pink-backed Pelican *Pelecanus rufescens* was seen to chase a Yellow-legged Herring Gull *Larus cachinnans* carrying a fish. The pelican made a prolonged and determined attempt to catch up with the gull over a period of probably 20 seconds. It showed surprising dexterity in its pursuit, twisting in the air and flying round moored fishing boats, sometimes to within only a few centimetres of the gull's tail. The gull was calling noisily but appeared to keep its fish when the pelican eventually gave up.

Some Bird Sites in Yemen

By Michael C Jennings

During ABBA Survey 38 to Yemen (October/November 2007) the following sites were visited. The notes provided also draw on information on the ABBA database.

Mukeiras (LB04)

The highland plateau near the town of Mukeiras is the easternmost outpost of the south-west Arabian highlands and as such it holds the easternmost records of several highland specialties. The plateau lies between about 1,900 and 2,300 m and is the end of a tongue of highland extending east from Dhamar. The underlying geology of these highlands is a mixture of granite and basalt with sandstone outcrops. The region appears to have a slightly wetter climate than more westerly points of the plateau and probably catches the edge of storms of the South-West Monsoon. East of Mukeiras the ground falls steeply away by 1,000m to the plains of Lodar.

The area is surprisingly well populated and the shallow wadis and hillsides are much terraced for the cultivation of sorghum, vegetables and some fruits. *Zizyphus spinachristi* and acacias are widespread trees in the area but are not particularly numerous, there are also some huge old fig trees (*Ficus* sp) as well as cultivated figs in the fields. Ghat *Cartha edulis* is not grown here, but there are a range of succulent Afrotropical plants such as *Caralluma* and *Aloe* sp.

Bird records from Mukeiras go back some way, this part of the plateau was part of the former 'South Yemen' and during the colonial period had an RAF station and was also the summer resort for the ruling emirs. It was visited by a number of birdwatchers during the 1960s. The airfield has not been used for some years but there are understood to be plans to reopen the airport to commercial traffic.

Birds present at Mukeiras which do not breed further east include Dusky Turtle Dove *Streptopelia lugens,* Red-breasted Wheatear *Oenanthe bottae* and Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*. Other common residents include Arabian Red-legged Partridge *Alectoris melanocephala*, Black Kite *Milvus migrans*, Fan-tailed Raven *Corvus rhipidurus*, Tristram's Starling *Onychognathus tristramii*, and Arabian Babbler *Turdoides squamiceps*, Pale Crag Martin *Pytonoprogne obsoleta,* Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis* and Arabian Serin *Serinus rothschildi.*

Historically records have included. Bearded Vulture *Gypaetus barbatus*, Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* Blanford's Short-toed Lark *Calandrella blanfordi* and Yemen Linnet *Carduelis yemenensis.* None of these have been seen in recent years. All except the Egyptian Vulture are at their easternmost point in Arabia.

Below the escarpment Blackstart *Cercomela melanura*, Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis*, Arabian Warbler *Sylvia leucomelaena* and Graceful Prinia *Prinia gracilis* are also common. This is also the region where Meinertzhagen collected the easternmost record of the Arabian Woodpecker *Dendrocopos dorae* a record that actually appears to be valid as the ornithologist P A Clancey was with him at the time. The escarpment below Mukeiras is also notable for being the easternmost point where the Hamadryas Baboon can be seen.

Mukeiras can be reached from Sana'a and Aden. There are plenty of campsites and small hotels in nearby Al Baytha.

Bir Ali Islands (OA04)

The volcanic islands off Bir Ali on the central southern coast of Yemen are the only significant islands between the Bab al Mandab and the Hallaniyat group of central Oman, a distance of some 1400 km. There are four islands of which the most important is probably Barakah. The islands are described and the summer breeding species in July 2002 were discussed by Jennings (2003). In view of the rarity of island breeding sites on the southern coast of Arabia it might be expected that these islands would be very heavily populated with breeding seabirds but this is not the case, in fact the complete absence of several breeding seabird species is enigmatic.

Confirmed summer breeding species on the islands include Socotra Cormorant *Phalacrocorax nigrogularis* and Bridled Tern *Sterna anaethetus*. Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*, Brown Booby *Sula leucogaster* and Sooty Gull *Larus hemprichii* were thought likely to breed however no proof of breeding was obtained during the July 2002 visit. The islands were visited again in October 2007 an this time Sooty Gull were confirmed to breed. Several unfledged young were still present on Barakah and Sikha islands when the minimum breeding population on each island was probably in the region of 1,000 pairs, judging by the large numbers of adults and juveniles present. However Osprey and Booby were not seen in October and the absence of these species at the time and absences noted also in April 2004 (Jennings 2005) rather suggest, after all, that neither breed.

One notable absence from the island on all visits has been the Sooty Falcon *Falco concolor.* So why does this falcon, the Osprey and the booby not breed? Perhaps the easiest to answer is the Sooty Falcon. This is a species that feeds it young on migrant birds, especially passerines moving south in autumn. Passerine migrants are surprisingly scarce over the Gulf of Aden, as evidenced by the still very short list of migrants (and in very small numbers) that are recorded on Socotra. It appears that most passerine species and individuals fly south-west, probably inland away from the coast, to cross to Africa at or near the Bab al Mandab. The Gulf of Aden is probably best avoided in autumn by migrants on account of the contrary winds of the South-West Monsoon. These circumstances would mean that Sooty Falcons could not guarantee enough migrant prey to feed young, hence their absence.

The Osprey is a common winter visitor to the southern coast of Arabia. In March 1993, 67 were seen along the Yemen coast of the Gulf of Aden and the population was estimated at 500 pairs (Porter et al, 1996). There may well be 1,000 birds wintering on this coast but it is now known that it is not a widespread breeding bird there as suggested. In other places around Arabia the Osprey tends to hunt in shallow coastal seas in the calmer waters on the land side of reefs. These circumstance do not exist in the

Bir Ali region and so the islands probably do not hold breeding pairs. The Brown and Masked Boobies *S. dactylatra* are almost mutually exclusive in southern Arabia.. The former is a numerous breeding species in the southern Red Sea where the Masked is scarce and the Masked breeds in large numbers on the Hallaniyat group, Oman where the Brown Booby is scarce. The Brown can be numerous off Bir Ali where the Masked is not recorded. The exception is that both breed in some numbers in the Socotra archipelago. The seas around the Bir Ali islands when compared to the Hallaniyat islands are probably much less rich in fish on account of the lack of up-welling cold waters, such as occur off the Hallaniyat group, a phenomenon which drives the abundant marine food chain there. Also the calmer water preferred by the Brown Booby are probably absent for much of the year both at Bir Ali and off the Hallaniyat group.

It seems paradoxical that boobies do not find enough fish to breed on the islands off Bir Ali yet 10,000 pairs of Socotra Cormorants can maintain a breeding colony there? That species was giving every indication of breeding during the October 2007 visit but unfortunately the location of the precipitous route to the flat top of Barakah, where the colony lies, could not be found and the actual progress of breeding was not confirmed. One worrying development since the previous visit in April 2004 was that there appears now to be a small semi-permanent camp of itinerant fishermen and snorkellers using spear guns on Barakah island. There was some evidence that they were also harvesting Socotra Cormorant young.

Aden Wetlands (KB02)

The Aden wetlands have always been one of the premier birdspots in Yemen. They are a series of coastal ponds and flats which have received a supply of sewage for many years, which has in turn created a nutrient rich area of rough pasture and thickets of doum palm *Hyphaene thebaica*, date palm *Phoenix dactylifera* and Mesquite *Prosopis juliflora*. The site has been a focal point for conservation efforts for several years but in 2007, thanks to a UNDP grant, the 'Aden Wetlands protected area' has become established with a fence round the main area of doum palms, some landscaping of the ponds, controlled flow of the treated sewage and most exciting of all, a beautiful three story observation tower giving unimpeded 360 degree views over the marsh and nearby areas. This is also an excellent spot to observe migrating raptors which formed a constant stream on 1 November 2007. The tower has plenty of shade and with a slight breeze it can almost be cool.

Outside of the fence there is about 50 ha of rough grazed marsh where a headcount of livestock from the tower produced 92 cows, three flocks of sheep and goats, plus a few dozen camels and donkeys. The site is the foeus of every herdsman in the district. The grass is cropped short and with plenty of pools the habitat is especially attractive to waders and they could also be seen well from the tower. More than 70 species altogether were seen at the site in a couple of hours on 1 November.

This site offers sightings of a wide range of wetlands species, passerine in the gardens and bushes, plus a constantly changing stream of migrants . It provides first class birding in comfort and one could spend a complete holiday at this spot.

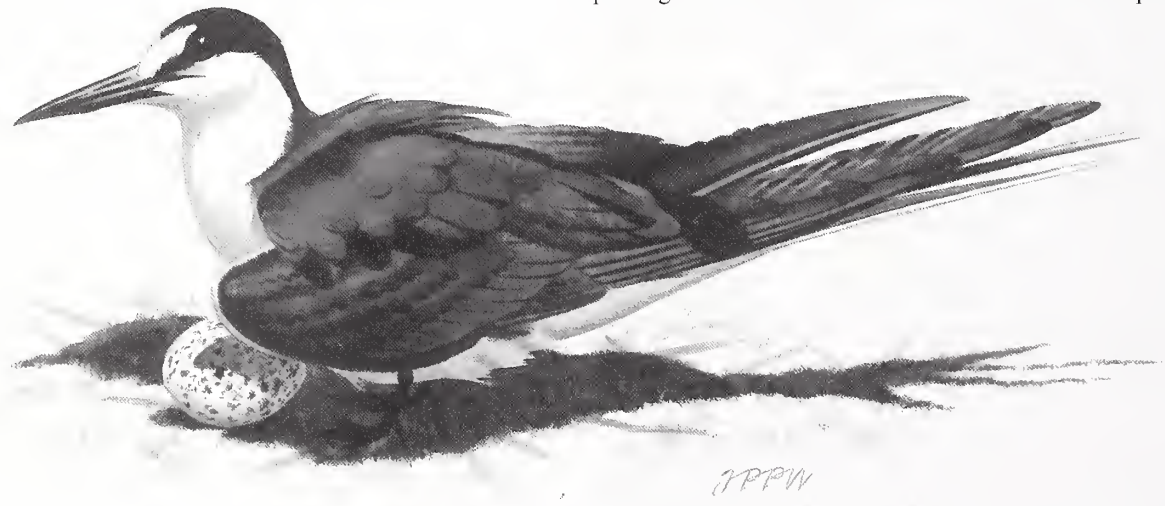
From Aden take the Little Aden road and look for the sign, it is also signposted Hiswa (Haswa) reserve. Access is not restricted, there are no security problems and there are toilets.

Bab al Mandab (JA02)

In autumn the Bab al Mandab is a major exit point in Arabia for raptors and other soaring migrants wintering in Africa. It is now possible to watch this autumn movement from one of the two small peaks very close to the coast opposite the island of Perim (known as Mayun in Yemen). The easternmost peak is 154 m high and holds a commercial communications tower. Whilst there were military personnel present on this hill in autumn 2007 they were not stopping access along the tarmac road to the top. (This situation could easily change in future). Another hill at about 250 m lies to the west and hold numerous military positions and can not be accessed. The first peak is probably the better of the two for migration watches as a khor of shallow water cuts in from the Red Sea coast and seems to deflect most migrants moving down that coast to the hill. The hill is also the natural waypoint for raptors coming along the Gulf of Aden coast to eross at the Bab.

There has still not been a definitive autumn-long count of raptors at the Bab al Mandab and this site would make an exeellent base for such a count as it gives 360 degree views of the area and there is even some shade (after 10 am) from the communications tower wall.

In three hours' observation on 1 November 2007 (0922-1222 hrs), a relatively calm day, David Stanton and myself eounted a considerable movement Steppe Eagles *Aquila nipalensis* (5,600) and Steppe Buzzards (2,700) *Buteo buteo vulpinus*, and smaller numbers of 13 other species of raptor (including Short-toed *Circaetus gallicus*, Spotted *A clanga*, Imperial *A. heliaca*, Booted *Hieraaetus pennatus,* and Bonelli's Eagles *H. fasciatus* and Egyptian *Neophron percnopterus* and Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus* as well as five Black Stork *Ciconia nigra*. For the most part observation conditions were very good with many birds passing round the hill often below the observation point. After



Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata*, possibly not so rare in the Gulf of Aden

midday passing raptors were very much higher and numbers were considerably reduced, suggesting migration tails off quickly in the afternoon. However on 9 November I carried out a further count (0734-1006 hrs) at the same site but only saw four birds! On that occasion winds were strongly from the SSE, which is contrary to the movements of raptors. It seemed that a kettle of raptors was building up over hill to the north but these birds could not make any headway against the wind. Later in the morning after 1000 hrs small groups could be seen passing to the west close to the Red Sea coast over the khor. I moved to a position under this movement and had a few hundred raptors, mostly Steppe Eagles, go over in half and hour, however they gave every indication that they would not be able to gain enough height to cross the Bab in contrary winds and would probably abandon the attempt.

Whilst in the Bab al Mandab area on 31 October 2007 a falcon trapper showed David Stanton and I an Israeli ring, No G22650, which he said had been removed from a live 'nasr' the day before. Later this ring was established to have been put on a Steppe Buzzard at Eilat on 27 April 2005 and is the first firm evidence that some Asian raptors wintering in Africa may take an autumn route across Arabia to Africa but in spring they return on a different route, west of the Red Sea, to Suez and then turn eastwards.

Apart from the movement of soaring birds there is not much else to see in the area although the khors have a nice range of waders including Crab Plover *Dromas ardeola*. A beach side campsite to the east (just in JB02) has a few Sooty Terns *Sterna fuscata* roosting on the rocks and these rocks are a good spot to watch for shearwater and other seabird movements. A village near the khor has a fish restaurant and shops with basic food and provisions. It is forbidden to camp at the observation hill.

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A Clamorous Warbler study

At the Annual General Meeting of the Ornithological Society of the Middle East, Caucasus and Central Asia in 2006, Brian Meadows (Email: *BrianSMeadows@lycos.com*), presented a poster paper detailing a seven year study of Clamorous Warblers *Acrocephalus stentoreus*, undertaken between 1997-2004, involving monthly transects through a reed-swamp at Khafrah Marsh (PB30), Eastern Province, Saudi Arabia, where he plotted singing Clamorous Warblers to determine the timing of the breeding season, hitherto unknown at the site, and if winter rainfall had any effect on the onset of breeding. In the year that winter rainfall failed there was significant correlation between rainfall levels with later singing. At the reed-swamp studied by Brian the maximum number of singing birds recorded along two 800m transects was 40.

The full text of the paper is planned to be published in a forthcoming issue of *Sandgrouse*. An abstract of his paper, which was presented at the above meeting, is as follows:

"The Clamorous Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus* has over the past three decades colonized inland wetlands (many entirely or partially manmade) in the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia reaching as far, north as Jubail from its original stronghold in the al Hoffuf area. Data from song plots obtained along two transects through reed-swamps and general observations during a seven year investigation at one of the sites colonized during the 1990's showed a peak of singing activity in late February and March save for one year when singing was delayed until April and early May. The latter may have been linked to exceptionally low rainfall in January during that particular year. Birds were present in all months during the study period indicating a negligible mobile component within the population.

The study site had a mosaic of open water and Phragmites but in one sector, which was heavily invaded by reeds during the monitoring period, there was a marked reduction in Clamorous Warblers and a corresponding increase in the numbers of migrant Eastern Reed Warblers *Acrocephalus scirpaceus fuscus*. The former returned to the sector following reed clearance and indicates intensive management of such newly colonized sites, if they are to be designated as nature reserves in the future, will be essential - particularly taking into account the rapid growth of Phragmites in Arabia as compared to temperate regions".

African and Eurasian Collared Doves at Yanbu, Western Arabia: Apparent Changes in Status

By Brian S Meadows

The Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* is a relatively recent colonist on the Arabian Peninsula and the first record in the central Hedjaz, at the Industrial City of Yanbu (EA25), was only in 1984. However, even as late as 1994 it had never been recorded outside of the industrial city although by this time the African Collared Dove *S. roseogrisea*, which was not positively identified within a 75 mile (120km) radius of the city between 1979-87, had been found at several sites in the hinterland in addition to records within the industrial city itself. By the end of the decade, however, the situation seems to have completely changed, Gary Bletsch, who worked at the International School in the industrial city between 1988-2001, informed me that he failed to observe a single African Collared Dove anywhere within a 75 mile (120km) radius of the city but had records of Eurasian Collared Doves for every month except July. During a visit to the area in February, 2003 I also noticed that Eurasian Collared Doves had increased significantly and, in addition to the Industrial City of Yanbu, birds were also present at the older port town of Yanbu al Bahr (EA25), 15 km north. Birds were most abundant on the outskirts of the town and included a flock of at least thirty birds feeding on grass plots at a sewage farm.

It was of interest, therefore, to learn in 2007 that in Egypt the Eurasian Collared Dove has now extended its range south all along the Red Sea coast as far as the Sudanese border, following the first record at Suez in 1979 (Cramp 1985). It had by 2007 apparently replaced African Collared Doves, at least in the town of Shalatein at a similar latitude to Yanbu on the opposite side of the Red Sea (Richard Bonser *pers. comm*).

The race of African Collared Dove breeding on both sides of the Red Sea is *arabica* (Mackworth-Praed and Grant 1957). Urban and Brown (1971) state that in Eritrea it is resident and a Palearctic migrant - presumably referring to Arabia. In Arabia its status is described as apparently a breeding summer visitor to much of its range although probably resident on the southern tihama (Jennings 1995). Of 12 records in the Yanbu area between 1988-1994 all but one, a December record, fell between May and September (Meadows, 2003) indicating a breeding summer

visitor; also based on records in 1944 (discussed in Goodman and Jennings, 1988) at two other sites in the central Hedjaz, Meadows (2003) considered that the species had been overlooked during the interim period and any apparent range expansion was not due solely to increased agricultural expansion and urbanization, such as is clearly the case for two other doves Laughing Dove *S. senegalensis* and Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis*. Shirihai (1996) mentions the earlier records and suggested these could be examples of birds reaching so far north through seasonal or feeding movements. As migrant birds it would be expected that numbers would fluctuate annually, particularly on the edge of their range. However, with the on-going spread of the Eurasian Collared Dove into the range of the African Collared Dove an assessment of the mobile component in the latter population, which could have given an indication of its true status in much of Arabia, is now unlikely ever to be determined.

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Sandgrouse Ecology At Jaaluni, Central Oman

By Salah S. H. al Mahdhoury

Since late November 2006 I have conducted pilot ecological studies of sandgrouse at the Arabian Oryx Sanctuary (AOS) at Jaaluni (Al Wasta Region) in central Oman. The collaborative project is funded by Diwan of Royal Court, Petroleum Development Oman and Natural Research (UK). Data on Crowned Sandgrouse *Pterocles coronatus* were collected when sandgrouse visited waterholes. Four breeding species of sandgrouse occur in the area, of which the Crowned Sandgrouse is the most abundant and the species most frequently seen drinking at Jaaluni. Ultimately, the study aims to provide baseline information on Crowned Sandgrouse ecology and behaviour throughout the year using a combination of direct observations, radio tracking and using microchip rings. I report on the first stage of my work, which I view as a pilot for further studies.

I trapped sandgrouse (n=40, 23 males and 17 females) using noose carpets at water in Jaaluni from late November 2006 to late May 2007. Twenty sandgrouse, in two groups of 10, were tagged with 4.5g necklace radio-transmitters and monitored for the life of the tag (about 5.5 months). Ten were followed during the winter and spring, and I am still following birds from the second group of ten (summer and autumn). Twenty-eight (17 males and 11 females) birds were also fitted with microchip rings, which uniquely identify individuals. These rings will allow me to monitor electronically the bird's attendance at the waterhole, and will facilitate collection of data useful in understanding population dynamics. Captured birds were measured and sexed before being fitted with rings and transmitters.

Mean weight of Crowned Sandgrouse was 243.5 ± 32.6 g and mean wing length was 187.4 ± 5.9 mm (n=40). Males were generally heavier [mean=255.0 ± 30.3 g (n=23)] than females [mean = 229.3 ± 30.2 g (n=17)], although there was overlap. Males also tended to have longer wings [189.4 ± 5.6 mm (n=23)] than females [185.1 ± 5.5mm (n=17)]. I did not fit transmitters to sandgrouse whose weight was lower than the mean weight for females.

Ultimately, I would like to look at using counts at waterholes as a means of estimating the population and relating fluctuations to rainfall and fog. The maximum number of sandgrouse recorded at Jaaluni was 588 in July 2007; the minimum was 13 in January 2007.

Drinking frequency of radio-collared sandgrouse was monitored in bouts of 5-15 consecutive days. In general, sandgrouse did not visit Jaaluni to drink everyday. Most typically birds visited every

other day. However, this pattern was not fixed, so some birds visited more or less frequently, or after a period of visiting every other day would skip some days. Normally about 80% of sandgrouse that visited Jaaluni actually drank, but on two occasions in May < 50% drank. During the third week of March few sandgrouse (both tagged and untagged) visited Jaaluni waterholes, behaviour that might be linked to the light rainfalls that occurred on 18 and 23 March in the south and south-eastern parts of the AOS. Table 1 summarizes some information on arrivals and departures of sandgrouse at Jaaluni. In general and as the timing of peak numbers indicates, most sandgrouse arrived and departed earlier in summer than in winter, but there was a lot of overlap between seasons. The period of time each day that the sandgrouse would stay at Jaaluni was more constricted during the summer months.

Table 1. Sandgrouse behaviour during winter and summer seasons at Jaaluni waterholes.

	Winter (Nov-May)	Summer (May-Oct)
Time of Arrival	0620-1200	0606-0740
Time of Departure	0805-1530	0818-1800
Time of Peak Numbers	0830-1030	0730-0830
Direction of Arrival	E-SE-S	N-NE-E
Direction of Departure	E-SE-S	N-NE-E

There was also a seasonal shift in the direction from which sandgrouse arrived and the direction in which they departed. Birds and groups of birds tended to arrive and depart in the same direction. This observation may be related to the seasonal change in foraging opportunities or in the location of nesting areas. Sandgrouse and evidence of their presence have been seen in areas where *Tephrosia appolinea* occurs and is setting seed.

As mentioned previously, the effort so far has been a pilot for future studies. Given the difficulty of the environment and the surprising lack of information on sandgrouse in general (this despite their wide range, large numbers and interesting ecology), I have been pleasantly surprised both at how easy it was to capture birds and that the survival rate of radio-tagged birds was so high. Although there are still challenges (e.g. due to size constraints transmitters are small and weak, and birds are difficult to track to their foraging areas) I am encouraged and think that further studies are feasible and will reveal much about this interesting species.

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ABBA and *Phoenix* Notes and Notices

Contributions to *Phoenix* *Phoenix* is published annually and contains papers, reports, correspondence and announcements submitted by contributors to the ABBA project and those interested in Arabian birds. Papers are not independently refereed but every effort is made to ensure that content is accurate. However the views expressed by authors are not necessarily shared by the Editor or the sponsors of *Phoenix* and the ABBA project. Articles relevant to the aims of the ABBA project are welcomed, especially notes on new breeding birds, the avifauna of specific areas or studies concerning particular species. Notices of reports and publications etc and requests for information are included free of charge. Articles may be emailed, submitted on disk, typed or handwritten. Charges for commercial advertisements and loose inserts are available on request.

Records still needed The ABBA project is nearing an important stage with the publication of the Atlas. However the database will continue to be added to after publication and the data made available to anyone who needs information on Arabian birds or the region. Readers who have records of Arabian birds, however old, and whether published or not, are urged to make contact with the Co-ordinator. Old records are especially valuable in assessing population changes and range expansions and contractions. Although the project concerns resident and breeding species, it is not only proved breeding information that is required, notes suggesting possible or probable breeding, particularly uncommon breeding species, are also very valuable. Information on exotics and escaped species, ringed birds and habitats is also needed. There is still much scope for collecting breeding bird information even for common species in well trodden areas. Would observers please continue to send in records and information for their local area and remember to copy ABBA report sheets to the local bird recorder (if there is one). Any outstanding report sheets for 2007 or earlier years should be sent in as soon as possible. All potential contributors will be sent full instructions on how to submit records, ABBA recording forms, breeding birds list etc, can also be found at the ABBA website: *http://dspace.dial.pipex.com /arabian.birds/*.

How to obtain *Phoenix* One issue of *Phoenix* is published each year. It is issued free to all current contributors to the ABBA project and is sent to recent correspondents. A bundle of each issue is also passed to all natural history and similar groups active in Arabia. It is available on subscription for a single payment of £25 (€35/US$50) for the next five issues, i.e. Nos 25-29 inclusive, or by an annual standing order (Sterling bank accounts). Because of excessive bank charges for handling foreign cheques those not having access to a UK bank account are asked to pay in Sterling(£), Euros (€) or US$ banknotes, or the equivalent in other foreign currency notes. Subscribers will notice that their address label includes a number which indicates the last number of *Phoenix* they have subscribed to. Would subscribers please send in their new subscription before their old sub runs out to avoid the time and expense of reminders. Free copies for those in Arabia and regular correspondents may be discontinued without warning - so to ensure you get a copy of each issue please think about subscribing. Back issues of *Phoenix* (Nos 1-23) are available at £2/€3/US$4 each (or the whole set for £30/€45/US$60) including postage. Those leaving Arabia might be interested in placing a subscription order as the price represents a small sum for all the news of Arabian birds for five years. Will subscribers please remember to advise of any future change of address. When ordering *Phoenix* please mention if you would like an invoice or a receipt. *Phoenix* is not available through agents.

Clockwise from top left:

Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* have as yet only been proved to breed in Kuwait where this picture was taken. The species is also suspected of breeding in the highlands of northern Oman. Their courtship ritual involves birds sitting together and the male arching its neck which displays the red crown. (Photo: Khalid al Ghanem).

Two well grown nestling Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* await food from their parents, Kuwait. (Photo: Khalid al Ghanem).

Part of the nesting colony of Pink-backed Pelicans *Pelecanus rufescens* north of Ibn Abbas on the Yemen Red Sea coast. Nests are made precarious in the tops of mangrove trees by camel browsing and no doubt many nests are destroyed in this way. This is the largest colony so far discovered in Arabia but how long it will survive is anyone's guess. See page 24. (Photo: MCJ).

A Pink-backed Pelican *Pelecanus rufescens* nestling sits exposed on its nest platform at the colony north of Ibn Abbas Yemen. The clutch of this species is usually two eggs but rarely do two chicks fledge from one nest. See page 24. (Photo: MCJ).

ABBA Website (*http://dspace.dial.pipex.com/arabian.birds/)* The ABBA website is long overdue a revision but unfortunately there will be no time to do that until the ABBA manuscript is completed. In the meantime the site does provide

- An introduction to the ABBA project.
- Instructions to those wishing to contribute records and the forms to use. (NB. An up to date list of Arabian breeding birds can be found in the centre pages of this issue of *Phoenix*).
- A bibliography of many hundreds of references to Arabian birds. This can be used as a search tool for species, subjects and places (This bibliography is updated each year - get the most recent update from *arabianbirds@dsl.pipex.com*).
- Index to previous *Phoenix* issues.
- *Phoenix* subscriptions and items for sale.
- Digital images from ABBA surveys.

ABBA contact details are on page 24.

Offset your Carbon Footprint

The London based charity *Pure* (registered eharity no 1112249), which calls itself the Clean Planet Trust, has a website *(Http//www.puretrust.org.uk/)* where you can calculate your carbon footprint for day to day living, driving or travelling. The trust offers those racked with guilt about what they are doing to the planet a means to offset the carbon cost of, for example, a flight from Europe to Kuwait to see a West Palearctic rarity, and provides redemption by an easy donation on line. All funds go to support offset projects to reabsorb carbon.

For example a birder could buy absolution for the above flight for about £23.40 (only £18.25 if you are a UK taxpayer and do gift aid). All it takes is a simple online form. A contribution was given to *Pure* for the flight to Yemen for ABBA Survey 38 (October 2007). *Pure* claims in its blurb that Ian Pearson UK Government Climate Change and Environment Minister is on record as saying on 29 November 2006 that *"The UK Government welcomes the launch of PURE's carbon offsetting scheme. The Scheme offers credits that have been generated from emissions reductions that are regulated, verified and for which there is a clear audit trail."*

Your donation made via the website will be used to buy and cancel carbon credits from emissions reduction projects that meet the high quality international standards of the Kyoto Protocol.

Viper Kills and Eats Wheatear

By Michael C Jennings

Lists of the prey of snakes often include 'birds' and one wonders how a rather sluggish venomous snake is fast enough to catch a quick witted and agile bird and then eat its prey which might be three or four times the circumference of the snakes head and body. During part of ABBA Survey 38 to Yemen in October/November 2007, I joined David Stanton's party of students and at one roadside group lunch stop east of Aden (MB03), someone noticed a freshly dead bird under a bush. Bending down to look at it a small snake (30-35 cm) revealed itself close to the bird making an aggressive rasping noise, it was a sawscale viper *Echis* sp. The snake then remained motionless about 30 em from the bird which was an Isabelline Wheatear *Oenanthe isabellina,* a winter visitor in these parts but a possible breeding bird in the highlands of north Oman.

The small vipers usually envemonate their prey in a quick strike and then let go whilst the venon acts, lest they are injured themselves by a struggling prey. The prey quickly becomes unconscious and dies nearby and its scent trail is followed up by the snake by 'tasting' with its flickering tongue. On this occasion it can only be surmised how the bird died but from blood on its wing it appeared to have been injured before the snake attack, perhaps it hit a passing vehicle and was sheltering under the bush, where the snake was able to get elose enough to strike.

The snake appeared to show no interest in the bird for several minutes, perhaps the throng of 18 young people and ten adults around it had something to do with that, but eventually someone placed the bird within 5 cm of the snake whereupon, to everyone's surprise, it moved forward and grasped the bird. Now for a snake to eat a bird there is only one way it can go in and that is headfirst. Getting the bird in the right position is probably innate behaviour for the snake. It initially grasped the dead bird by the 'shoulder' but gradually manipulated it until it got the head end in its mouth and then started to rachet its mouth over the bird. This eurious action involves the mouth opening extraordinarily wide (I understand the jaw actually dislocated for this) and the small teeth, once round the whole body, act like a one way valve. The snake very slowly, gulped the bird in, several gulps to the millimetre. It seemed impossible that such a small snake could open its mouth and throat cavity wide enough to take the body and the closed wings but it did. By the time the bird was half way in the skin and on the head and 'neck' of the snake were extremely expanded with scales appearing to be dotted onto the stretched skin. This event was a rare site that most people will only ever see on wildlife films. The whole party were able to crowd round and watch it, I am sure it was an experience many of the young people there will never forget. The strange thing is that the snake itself seemed to be oblivious to the presence and noise of so many excited people close to it. From starting to swallow to the feet about to disappear was about 30 minutes, and by this time the point of the birds bill could be clearly seen poking in the elastic skin of the snake's belly. However it was time for 'Everyone back on the coach!' so I never did see the feet disappear and the snake slip off for its post meal siesta.

Once the swallowing began it appears that this snake was rendered incapable of quickly disgorging the bird and striking at the onlookers. However all vipers in Arabia are potentially dangerous and should not be approaehed too closely and certainly not handled.

Pink-backed Pelican Breeding Colony at Ibn Abbas, Yemen

By Michael C Jennings

Breeding or suspected breeding of the Pink-backed Pelican *Pelecanus rufescens* has been reported from various sites in Yemen, including Kamaran (IB07), Tiqfash (IA08) and Toor Guailah islands (the latter is not located precisely but is probably in IA08) and Hodeidah (IB06) and Ibn Abbas (IB07) on the mainland. There are no details reported of dates of eggs or young, colony siting or colony sizes for any of these records. The evidence for breeding in the Ibn Abbas area comes from the report of Rupert Ormond who mentioned "a large colony was observed nesting in a mangrove stand north of Ibn Abbas" in autumn 1985.

On 12 November 2007 I was able to visit the Ibn Abbas colony which is in a large (about 2 km long), mature stand of the mangrove *Avicennia marina*. As the coastal track drew close to the mangroves it became clear that there were a lot of pelicans sitting on the trees and flying around the mangroves. My midday visit coincided with low tide and I was able to walk across the subkha and mud to the edge of the mangroves without too much difficulty. The mangrove stand had been heavily browsed by camels, a process that was continuing during my visit. At the northern end of the mangroves the effect of the browsing had been to open up large areas of trees and I was able to enter the mangroves and walk to some sturdy trunked trees (up to about 160 mm diameter girth) and probably 3-4 m high, with a canopy diameter also about 3-4 m, where I had seen pelicans sitting. All the trees in this area had been browsed up to about 3 m, the maximum reach of camels. Several trees held three or more pelican nests at the 3 m level or slightly higher.

I could see immediately in the middle distance one nest containing a single large chick and another had two chicks. Although I was tempted to examine the colony in detail it was clear the pelicans were shy and skittish so rather than disturb them further by entering the main colony area I decided to briefly examine only the nests in the first two trees where I had seen adults fly off. Examining the nests was not easy or pleasant. I was already covered in mud by the time I got to the trees which although easy to climb the nests on top were protected by a thick canopy of branches and all twigs were covered with a chalky powder of dry pelican guano. One could push ones head through the vegetation only with difficulty and then there was no guarantee of getting a view of a nest. I tried this but in the end I used my digital camera as a sort of periscope to get pictures of the nests, on a hit and miss basis. In the first tree there was one large chick in one nest and two eggs in another but the contents of the third were not seen. In the second tree (about 4 m away) one nest had two eggs, one seemed to be empty and the contents of the third could not be seen. The rough twig nests were rather small for the size of bird and some were less than a metre apart.

After the short inspection of the these nests I was able to count about another 130 apparent nests with adults sitting on them from the base of the trees that I had climbed. However the colony certainly extended further into the mangroves than my field of vision, evidenced by apparent panic flights from some disturbance within the mangroves, possibly the result of camel activity but I had also seen several youths in the mangroves. On the basis of my observations it seems likely that the colony is at least 140 breeding pairs (my scan count did not include nests in the immediate vicinity where birds had already left). However it is likely that altogether there are three or four times that number breeding in the colony, possibly 400 pairs.

Eggs and large young in the nest in mid November is consistent with autumn to spring observations of the breeding season in Saudi Arabia (where the species breeds to just north of 20° N), where young have been noted as early as late September and some nests still held eggs in early February. Even with a minimum of 140 breeding pairs, the Ibn Abbas colony is the largest reported from Arabia

There was another mangrove clump further north, also in IB07. This had been much more heavily browsed by camels which had completely removed the bushy understory and there was no sign of any pelicans nesting there. Neither was there any sign of pelican nesting activity during a short visit to the extensive mangrove stands at Luhayyah (IB08).

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